

Women's life writing 1760-1830 : spiritual selves, sexual characters, and revolutionary subjects

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**Women's Life Writing 1760-1830: Spiritual Selves, Sexual
Characters, and Revolutionary Subjects**


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Submitted for the degree of PhD

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I confirm that the work presented in this thesis and submitted for the degree of PhD is my own.


Amy Culley

Abstract

This thesis uses print and manuscript sources to analyse and interpret women's life writing at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. I explore printed works by Catharine Phillips, Mary Dudley, Priscilla Hannah Gurney, Ann Freeman, Elizabeth Steele, Mary Robinson, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft, Grace Dalrymple Elliott, and Charlotte West and discuss the manuscripts of Mary Fletcher, Mary Tooth, Sarah Ryan, and Elizabeth Fox. Of these sources, five have never been analysed in the critical literature and six have received little attention. Considered as a group, this large corpus of texts offers new insights into the personal and political implications of different models of female selfhood and social being.

In chapter one, I compare the religious identities presented in the spiritual autobiographies of Quakers and Methodists. For these women, religious identification provides a powerful sense of social belonging and enables public participation. However, it may also lead to a loss of self in the demand for religious conformity and self-abnegation. In chapter two, I consider the life writing of late eighteenth-century courtesans. These women adapt available models of femininity and female authorship in order to establish themselves as socially connected subjects. However, their narratives also reveal that dependence on the sexual and literary marketplace puts female selfhood under pressure. In chapter three, I explore the eyewitness accounts of British women in the French Revolution. I argue that, for these writers, connecting personal identity to political history is an enabling source of self-definition but it also exposes them to the risks of self-fragmentation.

In my focus on the social function of women's life writing, I present an alternative to the traditional alignment of the eighteenth-century autobiographical subject with the autonomous self of individualism. These narratives allow us to reconsider the productive and problematic dialectic between personal expression and representative selfhood, self-authorship and collective narratives, and individualism and social being. They suggest that women's life writing has the potential to be both the self-expression of a unique heroine and the self-inscription of a politicised subject.

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Introduction

With regard to my writing any thing respecting myself for publication I have never been willing to spend my time in that way, I once knew one that spent much time in that way and thought her experience would be rendered a great blessing, but when she was gone I never heard that one word of all she had written was made of any use in private and I well know none of it was ever published.¹

Mary Tooth, *Journal* (1796)

I have done no more than the most chaste and correct writers have done before me; having only related, what they have depicted. Youth has ever had it's extravagance, and it's folly. I have produced facts with *real* names; they produce facts with *fictitious* ones. I have thrown the cap at individuals; they fling it at the crowd; but, whilst I level at one, I do not miss the crowd; and yet advise the individual not to think, that either he or she is the butt, or solitary mark, as in the circle wherein they move; there are multitudes that deserve the stroke.²

Elizabeth Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley* (1787)

Are the French people, after all the mazy wanderings of the Revolution, are they approaching an asylum [...] This is indeed a momentous question. It is not made by me, as perhaps it may be by yourself, in the spirit of speculative investigation; to me it comprehends all that can awaken solicitude, all that can interest the heart; all chance of personal tranquillity towards the evening of a stormy life, and all hope of felicity for the objects most dear to me, and to whom life is opening.³

Helen Maria Williams, *A Narrative of the Events which have Taken Place in France, from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte, on the 1st of March, 1815, till the Restoration of Louis XVIII* (1815)

These extracts from the life writing of Mary Tooth, Elizabeth Steele, and Helen Maria Williams suggest the diversity of women's self-representations during the period 1760 to 1830. The Methodist preacher Mary Tooth anxiously distances herself from the realm of publication and asserts the integrity of her privatised reflections, even as she implicitly recognises that personal experience may find a public use. The biographer

¹ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', John Rylands Library, Fletcher-Tooth Collection, Box 14, MSS A-N, MS B, p. 4. Throughout this thesis, all original spellings in manuscript and printed sources have been retained.

² Elizabeth Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley*, 6 vols (London: Literary Press, 1787), VI, 196-97.

³ Helen Maria Williams, *A Narrative of the Events which have Taken Place in France, from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte, on the 1st of March, 1815, till the Restoration of Louis XVIII* (London: John Murray, 1815), p. 303.

Elizabeth Steele insists on her moral authority, destabilises the boundaries between fact and fiction, imagines reader and author inhabiting a shared social space, and presents scandalous revelation as moral commentary. Whereas, revolutionary commentator Helen Maria Williams suggests that personal history is shaped by public events and autobiographical reflections have a political significance, as the woman writer becomes a repository for the collective memories of the age. These women adopt distinct strategies of self-authorisation, articulate their lives in a range of narrative modes, and are variously positioned in relation to the literary marketplace. However, despite their apparent differences, in their self-identifications on the basis of religious, social, or political affiliation, and their shared emphasis on the use and function of their life writing, these authors highlight many of the larger questions of this thesis.

My research into female selfhood and social being at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries draws on a wide-range of women's life writing, from both within the literary canon and beyond. This project explores eighteenth-century women's self-representations and considers the role of personal relationships and social affiliations in their lives. My understanding of female selfhood as culturally and historically specific means that I am primarily concerned with the narratives of identity available within religious, social, and political communities at the end of the eighteenth century. However, this intimate engagement with the past is also shaped by the concerns of the present. Feminist critics of autobiography provide a powerful critique of the autonomous subject, arguing persuasively that personal identity is relational, multiple, and socially constituted. Informed by these debates, my emphasis on the social function of life writing presents an alternative to the traditional alignment of the eighteenth-century autobiographical subject with the autonomous self of individualism. At the same time, engaging with the particularities of the lives and self-representations of eighteenth-century women complicates my understanding of the feminist ideals of relational selfhood, communal affiliation, and the interconnection between the private and public realms.

The flexibility of the term 'life writing' allows me to explore self-representations outside the mainstream of literary culture and beyond a Romantic canon that has

privileged published autobiographies by male literary figures.⁴ In the context of this thesis, I am using life writing to refer to any published or manuscript text that constitutes an act of self-representation or articulates an individual's personal history. This includes autobiographies, memoirs, journals, letters, and any writing in which the author's sense of identity is shaped by the events she recounts. For instance, Elizabeth Steele's biography of Sophia Baddeley presents a shared personal history in which Steele's identity is created through her relationship to Baddeley and her self-image is refracted through the portrait of her subject. I also include historical accounts in which the individual is either present or implicated. Working within these terms, Mary Wollstonecraft's *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) is understood as a form of life writing. For, while Wollstonecraft recounts events that occurred prior to her arrival in Paris, she nonetheless writes in the midst of the Revolution and attempts to make sense of her present moment through her account of the recent past. Placing this work in dialogue with Wollstonecraft's more explicitly autobiographical travel narrative *A Short Residence* (1796) allows us to read her engagement with the French Revolution through a new lens. I also discuss women's fiction and poetry alongside their autobiographical writings when these texts seem to illuminate the author's sense of personal and social identity. Eighteenth-century women writers draw on a range of literary models and conventions in their life writing (including fictional, poetic, autobiographical, and historical), which frequently blur the boundaries between fact and fiction.

These formal experiments are integral to my discussion; however my primary interest is women's social identifications. I explore the tension between self and community in life writing that emerges from communities and social spaces and is understood as an individual and collective practice. As a consequence, this study does not seek to categorise women's life writing but ranges across published and manuscript materials and public and private works in order to explore female selfhood and social being. This approach does raise difficulties for the purposes of comparison, as the manuscript journal seemingly unintended for publication presents very different opportunities and challenges for women writers from a public self-justification. The

⁴ Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 1.

imagined audiences and the conventions of the autobiographical mode therefore shape these diverse self-representations, as much as the author's sense of identity. There is no claim made here for the genre of life writing on the basis of gender. Addressing the relationship between self and community in male-authored texts is another important step towards challenging the notion of autobiography as the self-expression of an autonomous subject. However, given feminist autobiographical criticisms' enduring preoccupation with the relational self and the debates within feminism regarding individual and collective identity there is a greater intellectual urgency for an account of women's communal identifications.

In order to explore the ways in which women writers create their identities through communal affiliations I focus on three categories of women's life writing; spiritual autobiographies, scandalous memoirs, and eyewitness accounts of the French Revolution. These narrative modes provide examples of writing that emerges out of a community or social grouping, such as the religious societies of the Quakers and Methodists, an aristocratic milieu of politico-sex in late eighteenth-century London, and the royalist and republican communities of British visitors to Paris during the French Revolution. In each case, the emphasis I place on the historical, social, and political context of these women's lives is determined by the principal preoccupations of the writers themselves. As a consequence, Mary Robinson emerges in this study as the Romantic poet, woman of feeling, and former courtesan of her *Memoirs*, rather than the feminist polemicist of the radical intelligentsia. This approach prioritises the way in which these writers imagine themselves or choose to define their identities, but is also risks distortions. In her *Journal*, Elizabeth Fox makes no reference to the French Revolution, despite the fact that by embedding herself within the Foxite milieu she is subject to the Revolution's political legacies in a way that is comparable to her radical counterparts Helen Maria Williams or Mary Wollstonecraft. In contrast, as a courtesan Grace Dalrymple Elliott is a contemporary of Elizabeth Fox and Mary Robinson, but she does not allude to this period in the *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* and defines herself exclusively through events in France.

The wide historical span of my thesis militates against drawing general conclusions about women's personal identities and social affiliations during the period as a whole. However, it does allow me to explore women's experiences of ageing and to consider

cross-generational identifications. It also enables an exploration of changes in identity formation within particular communities across time. For instance, I examine the tension between personal and social identity experienced by third and fourth generation Quaker women as a consequence of increasing social integration and religious schism. In addition, I compare the religious identities of Methodists who participated in the mid-century Evangelical Revival with those who came to the faith in a period of institutional consolidation. My interest in the relationship between personal history and collective memory, particularly in considerations of the nineteenth-century legacies of the French Revolution and religious women's identifications with spiritual communities of the past, has also necessitated a flexible historical framework.

My understanding of the autonomous or individualist self, a term which recurs frequently in this study, draws on a conception of the individual as a unified, bounded, and disembodied subject, created through reflection, and understood to be the source of its own meaning and action as a self-determined agent. Michael Mascuch suggests that the origins of the individualist self lie in the advent of modern autobiographical practice. He argues that 'in its position as the subject of its own life story, the individualist self is a creator/medium/product unified as a single, autonomous totality: the trope of the author as the hero and originator of his heroism.'⁵ This self-conception is exemplified by the opening of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions* (1781), in which he values his text on the basis of his unique difference and his capacity for critical self-consciousness:

I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am unlike anyone I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different.⁶

Throughout this thesis, the autonomous self is contrasted with a communal or collective model of identity. The autonomous self disavows dependence and connection in its emphasis on difference and self-origination, whereas communal selves (both embedded and embodied) are created through their relationships and their participation in familial, social, cultural, religious, and political networks. As

⁵ Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 22-23.

⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 17.

Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey express it in their feminist critique of the notion of the autonomous subject of liberalism, 'the move from individualism to inter-subjectivity brings with it a move from individually oriented values to those which recognise and affirm human inter-connectedness and dependence on social life'.⁷ Therefore, in contrast to studies that emphasise the role of autobiography in the self-realisation of the autonomous subject, I wish to enact the movement that Frazer and Lacey describe, focussing on human interconnections and social being, rather than individualist modes of identity formation. The concepts of autonomous and communal selfhood, as they are defined in autobiographical studies and communitarian philosophy, will be further explored in the course of this introduction.

My thesis is divided into three parts, focussing on the self-representations of the spiritual selves, sexual characters, and revolutionary subjects of my title and exploring the influence of religious communities, social and sexual networks, and political affiliations on female identity. For many of these women, personal relationships and communal belonging offer a valuable means of self-definition that releases them from inherited affiliations of kinship, gender, and class. Methodist Mary Fletcher may lament the conflict between family and faith, finding 'on the one hand disobedience to parents – and on the other disobedience to God'.⁸ Yet her rejection of her wealthy family and her union with a female religious and philanthropic community enables her to find fulfilment. In her late twenties, she movingly declares:

I dwell among my own people – a few who love me and who I love, the family is getting more and more as we would wish and as to our circumstances I can freely trust my God farther than I can see.⁹

The capacity for relationships to enable self-reinvention and social relocation is also evident in the lives of the actress and courtesan Sophia Baddeley and her biographer Elizabeth Steele. In their cohabitation Steele is able to 'forget my sex' and finds

⁷ Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 69.

⁸ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS I, 27.

⁹ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS II, 36.

liberation from conventional domesticity, while Baddeley declares she will not 'be the wife of any man' and yet remains protected by her 'marriage' to Mrs Steele.¹⁰

In contrast to these powerful images of female fulfilment and feminist self-assertion, these writers also suggest that social identifications and transpersonal identity place significant pressure on personal integrity. Quaker Mary Dudley experiences self-dissolution in her dependence on God and takes self-abnegation and altruism to a selfless extreme. Commenting on her inability to preach or write, she notes:

I feel unable to do as much in this line as I once could, nor am I even qualified to keep any little sketch of what I go through from day to day, as if all that is once passed was gone from my remembrance, by fresh exercise continually occurring; so that the poor vessel is kept in a state of quiet emptiness, except when any thing is put into it for others, which for a season refreshes and sweetens.¹¹

The former courtesan and Whig hostess Elizabeth Fox experiences displacement and 'belatedness' as a consequence of attaching herself to a past community, evident in her heartbreaking lament in her manuscript Journal:

A sad wet and gloomy day not like this day thirty one years since when the weather was fine and I was surrounded by dear happy faces full of love and affection, now alas! they are nearly all gone and here I am almost alone in this world of miseries.¹²

The writing of Mary Dudley and Elizabeth Fox suggests that interdependence and communal identification may compromise an individual's capacity for critical self-consciousness and displace her from her own self-portrait. Mrs Fox literalises this condition in her response to a portrait by Joshua Reynolds, commenting that 'they say it is very like I do not see the least likeness but one cannot judge what is like one self'.¹³ Therefore, while I am attracted to communitarian ideals that foreground the collective aspects of human life, working with these sources also suggests that 'community' is not unequivocally positive for women writers. At times, communal identifications and social networks are conservative in intention and effect. They may repress the multiplicities of identity and the differences between subjects, inscribe

¹⁰ Steele, V, 31 and IV, 110.

¹¹ Mary Dudley, *The Life of Mary Dudley*, ed. by Elizabeth Dudley (London: Knight and Bagster, 1825), pp. 216-17.

¹² 'Mrs Fox's Journal', British Library, Holland House Collection, Additional MS 51493, 21 November 1825.

¹³ 'Mrs Fox's Journal', BL, Holland House, Add MS 51493, 9 November 1825.

women within restrictive paradigms, and undermine the possibilities for personal integrity, privacy, and self-determination.

At first glance, there is a striking difference between the self-articulations of women who imagine themselves as the representatives of spiritual and political fellowships, like Mary Fletcher, Mary Dudley, and Elizabeth Fox, and the individuated voices of professional women writers, such as Mary Robinson, Helen Maria Williams, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The emphasis on sensibility and self-expression in the life writing of Robinson, Williams, and Wollstonecraft creates a vivid sense of these women as subjects and establishes their place as prominent figures within a Romantic literary tradition. However, none of the writers in this study divide neatly into relational selves or self-made subjects. In particular circumstances there are powerful reasons for women to claim autonomous selfhood whereas, in other contexts, these same individuals may emphasise communal belonging. Quaker Priscilla Hannah Gurney testifies to the power of ‘ministering friends’, evident in her euphoric account of a visit to her home by women ministers ‘through whom appeared to descend celestial showers of counsel and encouragement, as from clouds surcharged with spiritual blessings’.¹⁴ However, elsewhere she styles herself as ‘Lazarus raised from the grave’, remade in God’s image in a moment of rebirth which detaches her from family and friends.¹⁵

In contrast to Priscilla Hannah Gurney’s identification with a spiritual fellowship, Mary Robinson’s self-presentations frequently draw on the over-determined image of the solitary woman of feeling. She depicts herself ‘escaped from kindred tyranny’ and wandering ‘about woods entangled by the wild luxuriance of nature’.¹⁶ But Robinson is also embedded in domestic relationships and professional literary networks, revealed in her poetic production in a ‘mixed confusion of a study and a nursery’.¹⁷ Wollstonecraft’s epistolary travelogue articulates a similar movement between solitude and sociability. In a very different register from Robinson’s sentimental and domestic *Memoirs*, she locates herself within a community of universal sympathy:

¹⁴ Priscilla Hannah Gurney, *Memoir of the Life and Religious Experience of Priscilla Hannah Gurney* (Bristol: J. Chilcott, 1834), p. 80.

¹⁵ Gurney, p. 112.

¹⁶ Mary Robinson, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson, Written by Herself with Some Posthumous Pieces*, ed. by M. E. Robinson, 4 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1801), I, 141.

¹⁷ Robinson, I, 162.

What are these imperious sympathies? How frequently has melancholy and even mysanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind; - I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, made me feel that I was still a part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself.¹⁸

Wollstonecraft's evocative movement between critical self-consciousness and collective sympathies presents an elusive ideal, which suggests that autonomous and relational selfhood is more helpfully understood as a tension *within* individual subjects rather than as a characteristic *of* particular selves. As the writing of Robinson, Williams, and Wollstonecraft shows, the apparently isolated figure of the woman of feeling always has the potential to transform into the Romantic woman writer, personally invested in her political polemic and embedded within an imagined community of readers.

Taken as a group, these sources reveal the exigencies of religious, social, and political connection, the liberations and constraints of eighteenth-century constructions of femininity, and the implications of writing in a literary mode. Mary Dudley's self-presentation as a 'passive vessel' demonstrates that privileging relationality as an innate feminine category may reduce women to self-sacrificing altruism and inhibit their articulations of personal desire.¹⁹ Elizabeth Fox's lack of self-recognition reveals that communal identification is only empowering if a space for personal agency and critical self-consciousness is retained. However, Wollstonecraft's image of the 'particle' suggests that abstract individualism is untenable and undesirable, since detaching identity from interdependencies produces a sense of dislocation that is just as inhibiting as Dudley or Fox's collapse of the self into the social. Read in dialogue, these writers allow us to reconsider the productive and problematic dialectic between personal expression and representative selfhood, self-authorship and collective narratives, and individualism and social being. They suggest that women's life writing

¹⁸ *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), VI, 236-364 (pp. 248-49).

¹⁹ The terms of this analysis are borrowed from Jessica Benjamin, 'A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space', in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), pp. 78-101 (p. 85).

has the potential to be both the self-expression of a unique heroine and the self-inscription of a politicised subject.

The 'pragmatics of self-representation' and the communitarian self

My emphasis on the social commitments that inspire and shape women's life writing and on the role that self-representation plays in their lives is consistent with the recent critical interest in the 'use' of autobiography and the history of subjectivities.²⁰ This work is influenced by historicist and materialist approaches to life writing, prominent in the last two decades in the work of feminist scholars Felicity Nussbaum, Regenia Gagnier, Julia Swindells, Mary Corbett, and Linda Peterson. These writers share a commitment to the 'historical specificity' of 'concepts of the self and the forms that self-representations take' and foreground the role of social relations and discourses in the constitution of identity.²¹ In her seminal study *The Autobiographical Subject*, Nussbaum argues that eighteenth-century autobiography was crucial to the formulation of a gendered bourgeois subjectivity necessary for an emergent market economy, yet also provided a space in which to subvert 'hegemonic formulations of identity'.²² My approach builds on Nussbaum's analysis of discourses of femininity and the disruptive potential of female self-articulations. But in my focus on self-representation as a social practice, I move away from reading autobiography through the critical lens of the rise of individualism in order to explore the implications of relational selfhood, social networks, and collective narratives for women writers. This attempt to retain a place for female agency is informed by Regenia Gagnier's concept of 'the pragmatics of self-representation', which 'seeks to locate the purpose an autobiographical statement serves in the life and circumstances of its author and readers'.²³

²⁰ For a summary of these critical developments, see Trev Broughton, 'Auto/biography and the Actual Course of Things', in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. by Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 241-46 (pp. 243-44).

²¹ Mary Jean Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 4.

²² Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 37-38.

²³ Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 4.

Drawing on the work of Nussbaum and Gagnier, I focus on 'narrative' and its role in identity formation in three distinct but interconnected ways. Firstly, I examine the relationship between female selfhood and social constructions of femininity, domesticity, sensibility, maternity, and piety. Secondly, I explore the literary tropes adopted and adapted by women writers, including spiritual autobiography, sentimental fiction, and political history. Finally, I consider the generic structures through which women articulate their experience, such as the memoir, letter, and diary. I argue that social discourses and literary genres provide enabling sources of public recognition, self-reinvention, and self-understanding rather than simply acting as structures of containment and detaching individuals from collective concerns. The empowering effect of combining social and literary scripts is evident in Mary Robinson's *Memoirs*, in which she appears as the erotically fascinating actress and courtesan 'Perdita' dressed in 'pale pink satin, trimmed with broad sable'.²⁴ Yet elsewhere, she styles herself as the innocent ingénue and dutiful mother, declaring, 'I was dressed in the habit of a quaker; – a society to which, in early youth, I was particularly partial.'²⁵ As the historian Carolyn Steedman comments, 'people may use the stuff of cultural and social stereotype, so that it becomes not a series of labels applied from outside a situation, but a set of metaphors ready for transformation by those who are its subjects'.²⁶ My study of an earlier period therefore shares preoccupations with Mary Corbett's discussion of Victorian middle-class women's deployment of the language of 'the private sphere', Julia Swindells's examination of the role of literary genres in the construction of Victorian working women's subjectivities, and Linda Peterson's account of the 'poetics and politics' of Victorian autobiography.²⁷ It is also inspired by Gagnier, Steedman, and Peterson's challenge to the generic and disciplinary boundaries between autobiography, biography, literature, and history and participates in their project to allow individual female voices to complicate our theoretical assumptions.²⁸

²⁴ Robinson, I, 96.

²⁵ Robinson, I, 70.

²⁶ Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 103.

²⁷ Corbett, p. 12; Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985); and Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

²⁸ For a discussion of this critical trend, see Marcus, pp. 278-79.

In addition to the disciplines of literature and history, my understanding of identity as intersubjective and constituted by social narratives is informed by Charles Taylor's discussion of the historical emergence of the liberal subject. Taylor argues that, despite the apparent emphasis on internal sources of identity, the modern self exists within 'webs of interlocution', articulates itself through an ongoing dialogue with 'a defining community', and understands itself 'in narrative form'.²⁹ Taylor also allows a space for personal agency, suggesting that each individual 'may take up a stance which is authentically his or her own; but the very possibility of this is enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth'.³⁰ This attempt to highlight the ways in which the modern individualist self remains embedded within the social fabric is also evident in Maurice Halbwachs's work. In *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs suggests that identity is shaped by 'individual memory' that is 'a part or an aspect of group memory'.³¹ My thesis is therefore informed by communitarian theories of the subject and influenced by the persuasive critique of communitarianism by feminist political and moral theorists, such as Elizabeth Frazer, Nicola Lacey, and Susan Hekman.³² These critics argue that communitarianism is a potentially conservative theory that privileges a romantic ideal of pre-modern communities, fails to examine power relations within existing social formations, and reinforces the ascription of traditional roles.³³ For, as Hekman argues, a crucial weakness of communitarian political theorists is that 'they fail to problematize the "community" they idealize'.³⁴

Frazer and Lacey's theory of 'dialogic communitarianism' therefore provides an attractive alternative, since it depends upon 'being aware of the importance of existing practices and communities to human identity and life whilst recognising their openness and contingency'.³⁵ Helen Maria Williams imagines herself to be part of a radical political community premised on the 'common feelings of humanity'.³⁶

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 36 and 52.

³⁰ Taylor, p. 39.

³¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 53.

³² Frazer and Lacey; and Susan J. Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

³³ Frazer and Lacey, pp. 130-62; and Hekman, pp. 55-58.

³⁴ Hekman, p. 61.

³⁵ Frazer and Lacey, p. 208.

³⁶ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), p. 14.

However, these same values can also be evoked for conservative political ends, evident in the strident rhetoric of the loyalist Charlotte West who urges 'every man of property and probity' to 'rally round the throne and the king, and by protecting him, they would protect their own property, themselves and their families'.³⁷ Therefore this thesis hopes to contribute to debates within feminist autobiographical studies on the personal and political implications of the relational female self. But, as a result of its historicist approach, my central focus is women's social identifications and the relationship between private and public selfhood at the end of the eighteenth century. The rest of this introduction is devoted to locating my discussion within these overlapping critical fields.

Autobiographical subjects: individualism and the relational self

A dominant strand within critical discussions of the 'autobiographical subject'³⁸ over the last three decades is the opposition between an autonomous masculine self (defined by abstract individualism) and the feminine 'self-in-relation' (characterised by social embeddedness).³⁹ Laura Marcus's study demonstrates the extent to which the development of autobiographical criticism is linked to a cultural history of Western individualism.⁴⁰ This relationship is most clearly articulated in the work of Georges Gusdorf. His essay of 1956, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', is identified as the founding moment of autobiographical criticism by James Olney and is reprinted in translation in Olney's collection, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980).⁴¹ Gusdorf argues that the concept of autobiography is dependent upon a cultural moment in which a 'conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life' replaces the communal rhythms and collective mythologies associated with 'primitive societies'.⁴²

³⁷ Charlotte West, *A Ten Years' Residence in France, during the Severest Part of the Revolution; from the Year 1787 to 1797* (London: William Sams, 1821), pp. 18-19.

³⁸ This term is taken from the title of Felicity Nussbaum's study.

³⁹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), viii.

⁴⁰ Marcus, pp. 147-78.

⁴¹ James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 3-27 (pp. 8-9). Olney also acknowledges Gusdorf's debt to Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch and notes that the work of Anna Robeson Burr and Wayne Shumaker appeared prior to this date.

⁴² Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', trans. by James Olney, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (see Olney, above), pp. 28-48 (pp. 29-30).

Gusdorf's essay has an enduring critical legacy, despite the radical critique of the autonomous subject and the challenge to the relationship between language and self-representation by post-structuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis. The influence of Gusdorf is evident in the work of Roy Pascal in the 1960s, Karl Joachim Weintraub in the 1970s, and William Spengemann in the 1980s.⁴³ In a more recent work, Michael Mascuch draws on Gusdorf's theory to argue that 'the modern autobiographer' is 'the prototype of the individualist self'.⁴⁴ This reading is partly qualified by Bruce Hindmarsh, who argues that the evangelical conversion narrative represents 'an important alternative version of Enlightenment individuality' in its emphasis on the community of faith.⁴⁵ However, in his distinction between secular and religious autobiographical modes, Hindmarsh confirms Gusdorf's continuing relevance for discussions of life writing outside of the spiritual realm. Recent commentators on autobiography, Eugene Stelzig and Patrick Riley, are sensitive to challenges to the interpretative framework of individualism. Both critics read for moments of paradox and acknowledge the relational aspects of selves rather than presenting the history of autobiography 'as a unified march toward autonomous, coherent selfhood'.⁴⁶ But in their readings of representative texts, particularly Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Goethe, they perpetuate the canonisation of 'classic' autobiographies at the expense of the wide range of self-representations that exist within the period.⁴⁷

My use of the term 'life writing' is therefore an attempt to distance this study from the ideological grip of autobiography and its Romantic canon. This approach enables precious sources, like Sarah Lawrence's Methodist pocket book or Elizabeth Fox's book lists, to inform our understanding of female identity and self-representation at

⁴³ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 180; Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xi-xix; and William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 185.

⁴⁴ Mascuch, pp. 7 and 23.

⁴⁵ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 344.

⁴⁶ Eugene L. Stelzig, *The Romantic Subject in Autobiography: Rousseau and Goethe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 22-23; and Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Pascal, p. 36.

the end of the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Elizabeth Fox records the books she reads in each volume of her Journal and incorporates critical asides into her lists:

Miss Edgeworths last three volumes of Tales of Fashionable Life, do not like them so well as the first three vols. Miss Fox read Macbeth - Read Traits of Nature by Miss Burney very so, so, indeed Childe Harold, liked parts of it very much, it is certainly very unequal, but shews great genius – his prose is flippant and bad.⁴⁹

These book lists are in no sense a ‘complete and coherent expression’ of an individual’s ‘entire destiny’ nor do they demonstrate a ‘conscious awareness of the singularity’ of an individual life, to take Gusdorf’s terms.⁵⁰ However, they do provide an alternative commentary on the life presented in the main body of the Journal and allow an invaluable insight into the ways identity both shapes and is shaped by reading. After finishing ‘Buxton on prisons’ in 1819 Mrs Fox revealingly notes, ‘makes me quite long to be like Mrs Fry & her friends’.⁵¹

This flexible approach to life writing responds to the challenge by feminist literary scholars to the traditions and aesthetic categories of autobiographical criticism during the last three decades. As Linda Anderson persuasively argues, ‘feminism has had an almost symbiotic relationship with autobiography, which has often acted as the shadow and locus for its evolving debates about the subject.’⁵² A persistent thread in discussions within the Anglo-American tradition is the issue of relationality and intersubjectivity, evident in even a cursory glance into recent collections of feminist autobiographical criticism.⁵³ Mary Mason’s essay of 1980 ‘The Other Voice’, which appears in the same collection as Gusdorf’s 1956 work, inaugurates this tradition. Mason argues that ‘the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness’.⁵⁴ The widespread

⁴⁸ Sarah Lawrence, Methodist Pocket Book (1818), Fletcher-Tooth, Box 16, MS I.

⁴⁹ ‘Mrs Fox’s Journal’, BL, Holland House, Add MS 51480, Book List 1811-1812.

⁵⁰ Gusdorf, pp. 35 and 29.

⁵¹ ‘Mrs Fox’s Journal’, BL, Holland House, Add MS 51486, Book List 1818-1819. Thomas Fowell Buxton, *An Inquiry, whether Crime and Misery are Produced or Prevented, by our Present System of Prison Discipline* (London: Arch, 1818).

⁵² Linda Anderson, ‘Autobiography and the Feminist Subject’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 119-35 (p. 119).

⁵³ Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey, ‘Introduction’, in *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), xx-xxxiv (xxii); Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield, ‘Introduction’, in *Feminism and Autobiography* (see Broughton, above), pp. 1-21 (pp. 3-4); and Marcus, p. 219.

⁵⁴ Mary G. Mason, ‘The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (see Olney, above), pp. 207-35 (p. 210).

development of Mason's approach during the 1980s is due, at least in part, to the influence of theories of the 'self-in-relation' first articulated by Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic work *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and taken up by Carol Gilligan's study *In A Different Voice* (1982). Chodorow argues that, as a consequence of their distinctive relationship with the mother, 'women experience a sense of self-in-relation that is in contrast to men's creation of a self that wishes to deny relation and connection.'⁵⁵ Carol Gilligan draws on Chodorow's critique of the masculine autonomous subject, opposing 'a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection' and arguing that relationship, care, and interdependence are integral to human development.⁵⁶ The work of feminist critics of autobiography in the 1980s demonstrates the influence of these arguments. For example, Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that individualistic critical paradigms 'do not recognize the significance of interpersonal relationships and community in women's self-definition' and Estelle Jelinek presents the devalued relational self as one of the defining features of a female autobiographical tradition.⁵⁷

The work of Friedman and Jelinek is frequently criticised for producing an ahistorical and essentialist theory of female selfhood, but nevertheless autobiographical criticism remains influenced by theories of the relational self. Recent debates over the subject and the expansion of categories of female 'difference' to include race, class, and sexuality reframe this analysis.⁵⁸ Post-colonial critiques of the universalising impulses of Western feminism move the politics of 'representativity' up the critical agenda and

⁵⁵ Chodorow, viii.

⁵⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 35.

⁵⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34-62 (p. 56); and Estelle C. Jelinek, 'Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition', in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 1-20 (pp. 8-10).

⁵⁸ Anderson, p. 126. For the influence of Jacques Lacan's theory of discursive subjectivity on autobiographical criticism, see Shari Benstock, 'Authorizing the Autobiographical', in *The Private Self* (see Friedman, above), pp. 10-33. For the influence of Louis Althusser's concept of ideology and interpellation, see Nussbaum, pp. 34-36. For the influence of Michel Foucault's discussion of discourses of power, see Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 19-20; and for the influence of Judith Butler's theory of 'performativity', see Sidonie Smith, 'Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 10 (1995), 17-31 (repr. in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 108-15). For a summary of this critical history, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (see Smith, above), pp. 3-52 (pp. 16-37).

reveal the importance of addressing the plurality of identity.⁵⁹ This approach is evident in Gillian Whitlock's argument that 'to read for processes of multiple identification' in autobiographical writing 'is an important gesture to decolonization'.⁶⁰ In addition, Paul John Eakin and Nancy Miller argue against theorisations of relationality on the basis of gender difference and seek to extend the theory to all autobiographical works. Eakin resists a 'narrow definition of male selfhood and autobiography' based on 'the myth of autonomy', while Miller argues that we might 'more usefully *expand* the vision of the autobiographical self as connected to a significant other and bound to a community' to our reading of male-authored texts.⁶¹

This impulse to claim relationality as a crucial feature of human identity rather than as a sign of feminine difference offers a way in which we might recover the important potential of Carol Gilligan's work and free it from its apparently essentialist assumptions. *In A Different Voice* is often read as an assertion of the ethical and moral superiority of female subjectivity. However, at moments Gilligan seems to allow for the possibility that the 'difference' in voice may be a productive interplay between interpretative modes rather than a gendered opposition.⁶² She presents 'hierarchy' and 'web' as contrasting images of human relationships (aligned with an ethic of rights and justice and an ethic of care and responsibility respectively). She suggests that:

These disparate visions in their tension reflect the paradoxical truths of human experience – that we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self.⁶³

This image of a dialogic exchange between relational and individualist modes of being that takes place within the subject presents an enabling alternative to the feminine self-in-relation that Gilligan is more generally associated with.⁶⁴ It also allows Georges Gusdorf's binary of a self connected to the rhythms of the community

⁵⁹ Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (London: Routledge, 1991), ix-x.

⁶⁰ Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 5.

⁶¹ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories – Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 49; and Nancy K. Miller, 'Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography', *differences*, 6 (1994), 1-27 (p. 4).

⁶² Gilligan, p. 2.

⁶³ Gilligan, p. 63.

⁶⁴ This conclusion draws on Susan Hekman's reassessment of Gilligan's work. See Hekman, p. 163.

and a self-consciousness of the singularity of an individual life to be relocated as a tension within the individual subject rather than mapped onto a social, cultural, or gender divide.

Eighteenth-century subjects: female identifications and the private and public sphere

My discussion of women's identifications and self-representations also contributes to recent debates within eighteenth-century studies regarding constructions of femininity, the figure of the domestic woman, and the gendering of the private and public sphere. This study considers the continuities between private life and public agency and suggests that women's social identifications provide a source of self-definition across the private/public divide. This approach is consistent with Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson's insight that 'women's familial and community relationships played a crucial role in facilitating their participation in public affairs'.⁶⁵ Through analysis of the particularities of women's self-representations, my work explores the discontinuities between ideological prescription, self-conception, and social practice. It examines the ways in which individuals may adhere to an image of domestic womanhood that is in tension with the public activities undertaken in their everyday lives. Royalist writer Charlotte West is imprisoned during the French Revolution, but nonetheless attempts to retain her modesty and her commitment to social hierarchy. She refuses to speak to a 'kept mistress' and asks to be removed from a 'Female Dormitory' in favour of 'being mistress of a room all to myself'.⁶⁶ However, elsewhere, she revels in her experience of revolutionary freedoms, breathlessly recalling her role in a carriage chase when 'noisy and insolent' villagers attack her:

I was driving as my husband could not very well see at night. [...] There was no time for reflection: I whipped my horse, which was a very spirited one, and away he went. At the same time, I was obliged to whip *their horses* over the head to keep them *off from us*; and I can safely say, that there were moments when I did not know on which side we should upset.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, 'The Petticoat in Politics: Women and Authority', in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat*, ed. by Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 1-18 (pp. 10-11).

⁶⁶ West, pp. 85 and 71.

⁶⁷ West, pp. 34-35.

Feminist literary critics argue that as the language of domesticity became naturalised at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was more easily deployed to attain public agency, recognition, and sympathy.⁶⁸ However, as these same critics suggest, there is an ambiguous relationship between female 'presence, influence and power' that destabilises any simple equation between public prominence and participation.⁶⁹ In addition, religious identities complicate the categories of public and private, since the philanthropist extends the domestic mission of salvation outside the home and the Quaker preacher is at once a woman speaking on a public platform and a self-effacing vessel for the word of God. This ambiguity is evident in the address of Quaker preacher Catharine Phillips to the Philadelphia assembly on the issue of pacifism. Phillips claims:

This was no more than consistent with my office as a minister, and my commission to that country, which was to preach Truth and Righteousness, and to strengthen the hands of my brethren, against their opposers. Both myself and companion were so clear of improperly intermeddling with the affairs of government, that we sometimes checked the torrent of conversation on that subject, either by silent or verbal reproof; and but seldom so much as read their newspapers.⁷⁰

The complex interdependence of private and public is also evident in the politicisation of sensibility that pervades women's writing during the period. Commenting on her commitment to the French Revolution, Helen Maria Williams observes:

I blend the feelings of private friendship with my sympathy in public blessings; since the old constitution is connected in my mind with the image of a friend confined in the gloomy recesses of a dungeon, and pining in hopeless captivity; while, with the new constitution, I unite the soothing idea of his return to prosperity, honours, and happiness.⁷¹

For these women writers, personal identity and public selfhood exist on a continuum, which creates both an opportunity for self-composition and a struggle for self-cohesion.

⁶⁸ For an example, see Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 2002), xxiv.

⁷⁰ Catherine Phillips, *Memoirs of the Life of Catherine Phillips* (London: James Phillips, 1797), pp. 140-41. With the exception of the title page of the *Memoirs*, Phillips's name is generally spelt Catharine (rather than Catherine) in eighteenth-century sources.

⁷¹ Williams, *Letters Written in France*, pp. 71-72.

Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan comment that 'critical debate about the validity of the private/public model has been perhaps the single most important development in the study of women's writing of the period', following the wide-ranging feminist response to Jürgen Habermas's concept of the 'bourgeois public sphere'.⁷² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall are the most influential and controversial proponents of the model of separate spheres, first arguing in 1987 that the language of public and private was a crucial component in the development of middle class identity.⁷³ Davidoff and Hall's discussion of the cult of domestic womanhood shares many preoccupations with the work of feminist literary critics during the same period. Revisionist histories of the novel, studies of female authorship, and discussions of women writers' engagements with femininity place the figure of the domestic woman centre stage. Mary Poovey examines women writers' attempts to create a professional identity while under the shadow of the 'Proper Lady'.⁷⁴ Nancy Armstrong links the rise of the novel to the history of sexuality, arguing that the idealised figure of the domestic woman (characterised by privacy, modesty, and disembodiment) played a central role in the consolidation of middle class power.⁷⁵ Vivien Jones and Kathryn Shevelow explore cultural constructions of femininity in a range of literary genres.⁷⁶ Jane Spencer and Janet Todd demonstrate the expansion in the number of women writers and the increased respectability of female authorship by the end of the century.⁷⁷ These pioneering studies argue that the cost of moral authority and cultural centrality was a more restrictive conformity to the domestic ideology of femininity, making the story of the rise of the woman writer 'bittersweet' as Susan Staves describes it.⁷⁸

⁷² Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History*, ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 5; and Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into A Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

⁷³ Davidoff and Hall, xv.

⁷⁴ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), x.

⁷⁵ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷⁶ Vivien Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1990); and Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁷⁷ Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989).

⁷⁸ Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 26. For another recent example, see Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004).

The work of social historians and literary scholars over the last decade poses a challenge to the categories of 'separate spheres' and examines women's cultural, intellectual, and social participation. In her discussion of the lives and letters of a network of Lancashire gentlewomen, Amanda Vickery argues against Davidoff and Hall's 'domesticity thesis'. She suggests that the categories of 'public' and 'private' do not reflect the terms in which women described and understood their experience.⁷⁹ John Brewer argues that there was a 'remarkable interpenetration of public and private in this period', while Lawrence Klein highlights the 'mobility of meanings' of these terms.⁸⁰ In his analysis of 'gendered notions of conversation and discourse', Klein suggests that 'the enhanced stature of sociability and politeness involved a normative enhancement of the feminine' that legitimated female publicity.⁸¹ The editors of *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* also problematise 'the identification of the private with the domestic sphere and the family' and establish women as crucial public participants in their roles as cultural producers and consumers.⁸² Harriet Guest shares this concern, suggesting that women could exploit the language of sensibility, domesticity, and the 'feminization of patriotism' in order to imagine themselves as public citizens.⁸³ Anne Mellor argues that the values of a feminised private sphere (such as moral virtue and an ethic of care) dominated public discourse during the Romantic period.⁸⁴ In addition, Paula McDowell's study of women printers and publishers highlights new aspects of women's contribution to print culture. Although, her conclusion that 'mid- and later eighteenth-century women writers were increasingly forced to find new, *gender-based* ways of authorizing their

⁷⁹ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998; repr. Yale Nota Bene, 2003), pp. 5 and 10.

⁸⁰ John Brewer, 'This, That and the Other: Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), pp. 1-21 (p. 17); and Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1995-1996), 97-109 (p. 99).

⁸¹ Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender, Conversation and the Public Sphere in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices*, ed. by Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 100-15 (pp. 104-07).

⁸² Elizabeth Eger and others, 'Introduction: Women, Writing and Representation', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-23 (p. 17).

⁸³ Guest, *Small Change*, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Anne K. Mellor. *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 11.

public political expression' also suggests that women may have participated in disseminating genteel notions of femininity that ultimately worked to constrain them.⁸⁵

Women's public agency is also the focus of recent investigations into the practice of eighteenth-century politics. Linda Colley argues that through patriotic activism and contributions to the war effort during the 1790s women 'demonstrated that their domestic virtues possessed a public as well as a private relevance' and staked out 'a civic role for themselves'.⁸⁶ This approach is evident in Charlotte West's self-construction as the 'female patriot', speaking in defence of the 'Constitution of England' and concluding with the aspiration 'may the heart of every true-born Briton join with me in the same sentiment'.⁸⁷ The recent work of Anna Clark, Elaine Chalus, and Amanda Foreman highlights the role of elite women in the social and sexual practice of aristocratic politics.⁸⁸ Foreman's work on the Whig politician the Duchess of Devonshire goes furthest to establish the presence of political discourse in domestic spaces and demonstrates the potential for female participation in the 'hidden workings of back-room politics'.⁸⁹ Helen Maria Williams provides an eloquent analogy for this conception of women's political role in her comment that 'we often act in human affairs like those secret springs in mechanism, by which, though invisible, great movements are regulated'.⁹⁰

The expansion of the category of 'the political' is evident in recent studies of charitable and reformist movements that unsettle any easy equivalence between feminine philanthropy, female publicity, and feminist agency.⁹¹ Anne Summers argues that religious and charitable work was understood by women as a 'civil' rather

⁸⁵ Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 291-93.

⁸⁶ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; repr. 2005), p. 261.

⁸⁷ Colley, p. 261; and West, pp. 99-100.

⁸⁸ Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Elaine Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness": Women and Electoral Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 151-78.

⁸⁹ Amanda Foreman, 'A Politician's Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig Party', in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (see Chalus, above), pp. 179-204 (p. 181); and Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins, 1998; repr. 1999).

⁹⁰ Williams, *Letters Written in France*, p. 38.

⁹¹ Davidoff and Hall, xxiv.

than a 'public' activity and Patricia Comitini suggests that philanthropy and reform are not 'unequivocally positive; rather, they are complex modes of participation in the public sphere'.⁹² Recent commentators also recognise 'the importance of religion in structuring and motivating women's political consciousness'⁹³ and explore examples of 'conservative or counter-revolutionary feminism'.⁹⁴ This research eloquently testifies to the prominence of women in eighteenth-century life, while also raising questions about the personal and political implications of the public roles women adopt. Caroline Gonda suggests that women's presence in the public eye may be a sign of female inscription rather than evidence of their social agency.⁹⁵ In addition, studies that define women's public lives in terms of consumerism, domestic sociability, or moral guardianship may be complicit with the language of 'separate spheres' they seek to disrupt.

Michael McKeon argues that 'a central question for historians of separate spheres is the relationship – and the putative disparity – between the austere prescriptions of didactic discourse and the relative liberality of social practice'.⁹⁶ This distinction between theory and practice is highlighted by a range of scholars and is encapsulated in Linda Colley's claim that at the turn of the nineteenth century 'separate sexual spheres were being increasingly prescribed in theory, yet increasingly broken through in practice'.⁹⁷ An important response to the disjunction between 'meta-narratives' and the texture of individual lives is the critical shift to the 'issue of identity and the subjective', as Davidoff and Hall argue.⁹⁸ Vickery's work provides an excellent example of this approach, seeking to foreground 'the concepts which animated

⁹² Anne Summers, *Female Lives, Moral States: Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain 1800-1930* (Newbury: Threshold Press, 2000), p. 16; and Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women's Writing, 1790-1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 153.

⁹³ Gleadle and Richardson, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Harriet Guest, 'Hannah More and Conservative Feminism', in *British Women's Writing* (see Batchelor and Kaplan, above), pp. 158-70.

⁹⁵ Caroline Gonda, 'Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere* (see Eger and others, above), pp. 53-71 (p. 68).

⁹⁶ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 181.

⁹⁷ Colley, p. 250.

⁹⁸ Davidoff and Hall, xxxiii.

genteel letter-writers and diarists not twentieth-century historians', while Foreman suggests that 'theoretical models' have been replaced by 'individual case histories'.⁹⁹

The study of historical, social, and political movements through individuals and elite groups revives the historiographical model advocated by the twentieth-century historian Lewis Namier.¹⁰⁰ Establishing the 'personal' as a crucial component of political life is highly suggestive and consistent with Mary Wollstonecraft's powerful formulation that 'we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel'.¹⁰¹ However, a 'Namierite' history of the eighteenth century that considers public personalities in isolation from social contexts is also open to Davidoff and Hall's critique that 'the individual has moved to centre stage as collective identities have lost some of their salience'.¹⁰² The revolutionary history of Grace Dalrymple Elliott, courtesan to the Duke of Orléans, reveals the limits of this approach when taken to a personalised extreme. Commenting on her methodology, she notes:

My object being only to give some anecdotes of the Duke of Orleans, I will not pretend to detail all the events which took place; nor indeed could any pen give an adequate description of them, or any idea of that horrid and bloody period, which is a disgrace to human nature.¹⁰³

As Margaret Ezell argues, the sources we examine shape the histories that we write and our critical preoccupation with print culture and the individual author may obscure the importance of collaboration and social authorship for many women writers.¹⁰⁴ Rather than shifting the focus from the circulation to the production of women's texts or privileging literary coteries over networks of readers, in my thesis I juxtapose both manuscript and printed sources and read for their commonality as much as for their unique difference. The challenge for feminist literary scholars is not to abandon frameworks through which individual lives can be understood in relation to one another. Instead, it is to ensure that our existing narratives are sufficiently flexible not to exclude, distort, or obscure the experience of particular subjects. For

⁹⁹ Vickery, p. 288; and Foreman, *Georgiana*, p. 428. For an analysis of this debate, see Guest, *Small Change*, pp. 5-13.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis Namier, *Personalities and Powers* (London: Hamilton, 1955), pp. 1-7.

¹⁰¹ Wollstonecraft, *Residence*, p. 325.

¹⁰² Davidoff and Hall, xxxiii.

¹⁰³ Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 38.

the writers in this study do not understand themselves as ‘individual case histories’, but make sense of their identities in relation to a fabric of social narratives.

Spiritual selves, sexual characters, and revolutionary subjects

My commitment to locating women’s self-representations within a collective framework and my argument that individuals understand their lives through reference to ‘defining’ communities shapes the structure of this thesis. It is divided into three parts, focussing on religious communities, social and sexual networks, and political affiliations. In chapter one, I compare the models of religious selfhood and social being available to women within the spiritual fellowships of Quakerism and Methodism. I argue that religious association provides women with an empowering communal identity and allows for the possibility of self-reinvention. It fosters a sense of spiritual equality and female solidarity, as women establish a public voice as preachers and assert their social agency as philanthropists. However, attaching the self to a religious community also exacts a potential cost. These writers struggle to conform to a communal paradigm of spiritual identity and attempt to reconcile personal piety, sectarian belonging, and social conventions. Religious discourses prove to be complicit with a language of female self-sacrifice, even as they assert women’s spiritual and moral status and legitimise their public actions.

My discussion begins with the spiritual autobiographies of Quakers Catharine Phillips (1726-1795), Mary Dudley (1750-1824), and Priscilla Hannah Gurney (1757-1828). I then examine a collection of intertwined manuscript sources written by Methodist Mary Fletcher (1739-1815) and her spiritual protégé Mary Tooth (1778-1843). Next, I turn to the autobiography of Bible Christian Ann Freeman (1797-1826), whose radical life ‘out of connexion’ provides a revealing counterpoint to these ‘methodised’ subjects. I conclude with the transcribed oral history of Sarah Ryan (1724-1768), which has never before been the subject of literary analysis or religious scholarship. This critical neglect may be a response to Ryan’s frank expressions of faith and sexual desire, evident in her startling declaration that when she met her second husband ‘the moment I saw him it was as if Satan entered into me’.¹⁰⁵ It also suggests the ways in

¹⁰⁵ ‘Mrs Ryan Life’, Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS I, 15. Dictated to Mary Fletcher around 1767.

which spiritual and critical paradigms work to exclude or obscure anomalous female experience, an issue this study seeks, at least in part, to redress.

Taken as a group, these narratives challenge the equation between autonomy and agency, present alternative models of female social participation, and destabilise the categories of private and public life. They also complicate our understanding of the role of social networks in women's lives, as they suggest that attaching identity to a community may reduce selfhood to an accumulation of altruistic services to others, lock women into cycles of dependence, or precipitate disabling self-comparisons. However, at the same time, they reveal the personal and spiritual impoverishment of a life 'out of connexion' and highlight the potential fulfilment of communal belonging. As Mary Tooth evocatively remarks on the anniversary of her union with the Methodists, 'this day six years I was admitted an unworthy member of the dear people of God and since that time I've not known one moment wherein the language of my soul has not been: "Numbered with them may I be / Here and in Eternity.'"¹⁰⁶

In chapter two, I turn from spiritual selves to sexual characters and explore the life writing of late eighteenth-century courtesans. I argue that these women writers adapt available models of femininity and female authorship and revise generic conventions in order to write themselves back into recognisable roles as socially connected subjects. Despite this creative response to social dislocation, at times these writers struggle to establish continuity between a private self and a public character and reveal their precarious dependence on the sexual and literary marketplace. In addition, there is always the potential for them to ventriloquise social or literary scripts that compound their marginal status, detach them from communal experience, and re-inscribe them within restrictive stereotypes.

My discussion begins with the biography of Sophia Baddeley (1745-1786), written by her companion Elizabeth Steele (1741-1787), and the posthumously published memoir of Mary Robinson (1758-1800). For Steele and Robinson, life writing is an act of self-authorship and self-vindication. They cast themselves as the heroines of their own narratives and imagine themselves embedded within a sympathetic

¹⁰⁶ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS H, 28 July 1802.

community of readers. Steele fuses satire, sentiment, and social commentary. She presents her relationship with Baddeley as a companionate marriage and attaches their shared personal history to universal narratives of female experience in an attack on sexual double standards, financial exploitation, and domestic violence. In contrast, in her self-construction as a Romantic artist and heroine of sensibility, Robinson translates her sense of social exile into a source of literary authority and a conduit for public sympathy. For in the *Memoirs*, she presents herself simultaneously as a sexual, literary, and moral character.

This chapter concludes with a very different mode of self-representation from Steele's scandalous memoir and Robinson's Romantic autobiography. It considers the unpublished manuscript *Journal of Elizabeth Fox* (1750-1842), former courtesan and wife of Charles James Fox. The thirty-four volumes of hand-written entries, covering the period 1806 to 1841, present a fascinating resource for exploring Regency selfhood and provide an intimate textual engagement with the life and thoughts of an eighteenth-century woman. I argue that Elizabeth Fox's impulse to evade the 'sins' of her past and recreate her sense of self through connection to a familial, social and political milieu is both a source of creative freedom and a threat to personal integrity. Read in dialogue, Steele, Robinson, and Fox suggest that becoming the heroine of a self-determined narrative fosters a sense of unique self-worth and critical self-consciousness. But it is only an empowering mode of identity if personal history is connected to social narratives and collective experiences. For in their life writing, these authors find alternative ways to address an imagined community of readers in which they will find a retrospective means of social belonging. This desire for connection pervades their writing, for in the apparently 'private' space of Elizabeth Fox's *Journal* we find recurrent apostrophes to friendship, encapsulated in her comment following a fete that 'I saw a great many old friends there and I am happy to say not with new faces'.¹⁰⁷

In the final chapter, I examine the eyewitness accounts of British women in the French Revolution and explore the implications of republican and royalist commitments for women writers. I argue that political affiliation is a potentially

¹⁰⁷ 'Mrs Fox's Journal', BL, Holland House, Add MS 51497, 15 June 1831.

enabling source of self-definition and a catalyst for self-transformation. It is a means to attach private life to public citizenship and individual desires to collective concerns. This symbiotic relationship is also potentially problematic. Women risk self-fragmentation in the conflict between personal ideals and political practices and are subject to constant self-revision in response to the radical flux of events. In their attachment to a utopian future or a past golden age they are threatened with displacement from the present. In addition, individual desires can be silenced by a corporate agenda, as women's voices are potentially absorbed within a rallying cry.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the revolutionary histories of Girondin supporters Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Both women imagine themselves as citizens of the world. However, while Wollstonecraft initially advocates a politics premised on rationalism and understands herself as a critically detached spectator, Williams embraces a sentimental politics of the heart within a universal community forged through sympathetic exchange. For Williams and Wollstonecraft, the violence of the French Revolution precipitates a crisis in their personal identities, registered in the mutation in the aesthetic form of their life writing. They are forced to reassess the responsibilities and risks of universal citizenship and political spectatorship, yet both writers discover a source of personal continuity in their enduring faith in radical politics and social sympathy.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider the life writing of royalists Grace Dalrymple Elliott (1754-1823) and Charlotte West.¹⁰⁸ As an aristocratic francophile and former courtesan, Elliott conflates sexual and political identity and articulates an alternative to a reformist political discourse of rationalism. Her narrative reveals the personal risks of 'boudoir politics' ('the exchange of political influence for sexual favours') and its increasing obsolescence in a post-revolutionary era.¹⁰⁹ Charlotte West imagines herself as a female patriot on an evangelical mission of national and political salvation and presents a model of female political authority premised on domesticity, morality, and propriety. But her political participation is dependent on shaping personal experience and self-expression to conform to a conservative

¹⁰⁸ The dates of Charlotte West's birth and death are unknown.

¹⁰⁹ Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 125.

feminine ideal. In their diverse ways these writers attempt to reconcile personal sympathies with political commitments and aspire to a narrative mode that accommodates both private experience and collective history. Their life writing is therefore a testament to the consequences, challenges, and opportunities of establishing continuity between the personal and political realms. This condition is movingly described by Helen Maria Williams in 1819 in her claim that the Revolution has been ‘interwoven with every thing around me, linked with all my hopes or fears, connected with my very existence, and fixing irreparably my destiny’.¹¹⁰

There are both freedoms and constraints for women in identification as spiritual selves, sexual characters, or revolutionary subjects at the end of the eighteenth century. Religious affiliation provides a means of self-definition and communal belonging and allows self-reinvention and social activity, but it falls short of enabling women to articulate a public female self or imagine themselves as secular citizens. In contrast, women who inhabit the role of courtesan write as the self-authored subjects of self-determined narratives, but the strains of a marginal position are evident in their repeatedly expressed desires for sympathy and social connection. Faith seems to offer women a quietist retreat into an otherworldly realm and sexuality has the potential to exile an individual to the margins. By comparison, politics encourages social engagement and allows women to imagine themselves as part of a broader community organised around shared principles. Yet, the consequence of connecting private life and public citizenship is that personal identity may need to be revised as the political agenda is rewritten. Whether these writers define themselves primarily on the basis of religious, social, or political affiliation (or more commonly a combination of all three) their life writing demonstrates the importance of reconciling personal identity and social belonging, creative autonomy and collective narratives.

¹¹⁰ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters on the Events which have Passed in France since the Restoration in 1815* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1819), pp. 3-4.

ONE

'As Face Answered Face in a Glass' and the Rivers that 'Flow from Heart to Heart': Quaker and Methodist Women's Autobiography

The Quaker preacher Mary Dudley's aspiration for a faith in which 'face answered face in a glass'¹ presents a striking contrast to the Wesleyan Methodist Mary Fletcher's description of the rivers that 'flow from heart to heart'.² This chapter explores the implications of these opposing models of selfhood and social being, through analysis of a range of life writing by Quaker and Methodist women at the end of the eighteenth century. I discuss the ways in which these women experience and articulate their identities and consider the function of autobiography in their lives. These writers understand their personal histories in terms of 'providential' direction and attempt to live up to a script authored by God and mediated through the religious community. Spiritual autobiographies therefore describe a movement from isolation to belonging and articulate an individuated relationship to God within the shared tropes and narrative patterns of a literary tradition. In my discussion of both print and manuscript sources, I argue that while religious affiliation enables self-definition, social agency, and communal belonging it also places female selfhood under pressure. Through faith women attain public roles as preachers and philanthropists. However, spiritual equality frequently coexists with social and sexual discrimination. Spiritual conversion presents a creative opportunity for self-reinvention and provides an alternative to self-identification on the basis of kinship, class, and gender. Yet, it is also a coercive demand for personal transformation, predicated upon intense and ongoing self-examination and conformity to a pre-existent communal paradigm. Believers risk self-fragmentation in their attempts to reconcile an individuated relationship to God with religious and social conformity and struggle to adhere to both the spiritual demand for self-abnegation and the autobiographical imperative for self-expression.

¹ Mary Dudley, *The Life of Mary Dudley*, ed. by Elizabeth Dudley (London: Knight and Bagster, 1825), p. 20. This phrase also has a biblical source: 'As in water face *answereth* to face, so the heart of man to man'. Proverbs 27. 19.

² 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', John Rylands Library, Fletcher-Tooth Collection, Box 23, MS I, 35. All quotations are taken from the first draft of the manuscript, which consists of four parts page-numbered separately.

My study compares the models of religious selfhood and social being available to women within the spiritual fellowships of Quakerism and Methodism. The Quaker autobiographers in this study, Catharine Phillips (1727-1794), Mary Dudley (1750-1823), and Priscilla Hannah Gurney (1757-1828) wrote from within a contradictory religious culture, shaped by both a radical legacy of religious activism and increasing social integration. The Quakers were a nonconformist sect, formed during the Interregnum under the leadership of George Fox. They were committed to the primacy of the individual conscience (or inner light) over the authority of the law, Established Church, and Scripture. By the late eighteenth century, the Quaker movement was dominated by quietism and premised on individualistic piety, silent telepathic connection, suspicion of the body and the word, and an insular sectarianism. The Quakers' highly successful social and economic integration meant that secular models of femininity influenced Phillips, Dudley, and Gurney's self-conceptions. However, looking beyond their contemporary context, these women were also the inheritors of a tradition of spiritual egalitarianism and prophecy that could be traced to the mid-seventeenth century.

Mary Dudley's evocative characterisation of her faith as the answering face in the glass suggests the strong emphasis placed on personal analysis and self-reflection by a sect that privileged self-knowledge over religious conformity. However, the divided faces are also symbolic of the feelings of self-fragmentation experienced as a result of Quakerism's troubled transformation from sect to denomination, its negative construction of personal identity, and the coexistence of quietist and evangelical principles and practices. Regarded in this light, the face in the mirror perhaps represents a sympathetic readership rather than an answering aspect of the self. For these women attempt to write themselves out of isolation and find solace for their feelings of self-division, in texts that seem designed to console rather than convert. For the transatlantic preacher Catharine Phillips, the image of the mirror represents the liberating potential she discovers in looking outside the self and creating a public voice through dialogue with an 'answering' past. Phillips exploits the contradictions within Quakerism and adapts available models of identity, such as the woman prophet and the 'mother in Israel'. In contrast, Mary Dudley constructs herself as a passive vessel and absorbs herself within a spiritual fellowship that is predicated on self-annihilation and silence. As a consequence, she experiences self-division,

inarticulacy, and a disabling insularity. However, while Dudley becomes the reflection rather than the origin of the answering face in the glass, fourth-generation Quaker Priscilla Hannah Gurney takes the sect's commitment to personal revelation and self-dissolution to its logical conclusion. She avoids both Phillips's example of self-affirmation through identification and Dudley's desire for self-consistency through absorption, and instead imagines spiritual conversion as a liberating moment of disinheritance and self-reinvention. She therefore presents the figure in the mirror as an 'answering' face and a source of sympathy rather than a corporate image of conformity that must be 'answered'. The Quaker narratives challenge the assumption that autonomy is the only possible mode of female empowerment or public agency. Phillips and Gurney both fashion an enabling identity from within a sectarian community premised on self-abnegation. However, the cautionary figure of Mary Dudley also reveals that self-transcendence and collective identification are not inherently liberating. For relinquishing the status of an individual subject and constructing the self as a vessel may ultimately result in a conflicted withdrawal into silence and a disabling fear of contamination by the 'other'.

In the second part of this chapter, my exploration of the consequences of relational selfhood and religious association in the lives of eighteenth-century women is reframed through analysis of the life writing of Wesleyan Methodist Mary Fletcher (1739-1815) and her companion Mary Tooth (1778-1843). In contrast to the separatist dissenting community of the Quakers, Methodism emerged in the mid-eighteenth century as part of the Evangelical Revival and remained within the Church of England until its secession in 1795. For many female followers, Methodism was a voluntary affiliation (chosen rather than inherited) that resulted in self-incorporation within an earthly spiritual fellowship. Methodism allowed Fletcher and Tooth to establish a confident sense of collective identity and self-consistency, fostered by interactions in class and band meetings, itinerant networks, a shared literary culture, a social and affective model of spirituality, and an emphasis on personal religious experience. Collective reformation was central to the Methodist faith, encapsulated in Mary Fletcher's metaphor of the rivers that 'flow from heart to heart' that presents an alternative to the individualised sympathetic exchange of Quakerism's answering 'face in the glass'. For Fletcher and Tooth, faith is a vehicle for rebellion against family, class, and domestic circumstances. It allows them to abandon inherited

connections and socially determined narratives of identity in favour of supportive voluntaristic associations and a life of public action. But their spirituality is also premised on self-discipline and communal regulation, potentially collapsing the boundaries between interiority and exteriority and private and public selfhood. Therefore, the life writing of Fletcher and Tooth is as much an act of self-effacement as it is a liberating instance of self-creation, in which these writers assimilate themselves within a 'methodised' ideal and recast themselves as Methodism's representative subjects.

Methodism's paradoxical status as a force that enables liberating self-determination yet also demands coercive conformity is foregrounded in the autobiography of Ann Freeman (1797-1826). Freeman identifies herself first as a Methodist and subsequently as a Bible Christian (a sect that split from Methodism in 1815 under the leadership of William O'Bryan and James Thorne). In contrast to John Wesley's model of communal spirituality, Freeman ultimately asserts her independence from formalised religion in 1824. This oppositional status enables her to construct a radically self-determined identity and articulate a proto-feminist agenda. Fletcher and Tooth's writing suggests what is at stake in identifying with the prescriptive patterns of a religious community. Whereas, Freeman's *Memoir* expresses the pain of a life out of 'connexion' and reveals the impossibility of living in a state of spiritual atomisation. However, despite her apparent impulse towards oppositional individuality, Freeman's social and spiritual utopia is a truly trans-denominational religious fellowship. For she combines Methodism's felt faith transmitted from heart to heart with the sympathetic and telepathic connection of Quakerism's answering face in the glass.

This chapter ends with the forgotten history of Methodist preacher Sarah Ryan (1724-1768), which has remained buried in the archive since Ryan dictated it to Mary Fletcher around 1767.³ In its problematic fusion of spirituality and sexuality, the soul and the body, religious tropes and fictional figures, it has been excluded from the Methodist literary canon. However, it resurfaces here as a reminder of the unsaid

³ 'Mrs Ryan Life', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS I.

within these collective expressions of spirituality and as a testament to both the empowering and limiting potential of communal spiritual identity.

Spiritual autobiography is characterised by Elaine Hobby as a mode of autonomous self-expression that allows women writers a public voice and a textual space in which to explore non-religious experience.⁴ However, in answer to this emphasis on self-affirmation, Felicity Nussbaum suggests that the conversion narrative may represent an 'ideological framework' through which individuals internalise the values of the religious society.⁵ The majority of commentators position themselves between these alternatives of personal expression and communitarian incorporation. They discuss spiritual autobiography in terms of a productive dialectic between the claims of self and community or read the form in dialogue with other literary genres, such as the romance (like Mary Anne Schofield) or the picaresque (like Isabel Rivers).⁶ The 'hybrid' nature of the spiritual autobiography is frequently stressed, evident in Carol Edkins's characterisation of its ability to display 'individuality within the confines of conventionality'.⁷ Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that the autobiographical act is 'a means both of confirming the subject's faithful imitation of models and of renouncing imitation altogether by transposing the self into the key of textuality'.⁸ In her analysis of Victorian women's spiritual autobiographies, Linda Peterson argues that 'the religious self' is 'consciously under construction by an individual, constantly under revision by the community'.⁹ In the most recent of these works, Bruce Hindmarsh suggests that the evangelical conversion narratives 'appear both individual and

⁴ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-88* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), pp. 69-75.

⁵ Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 82.

⁶ Mary Anne Schofield, "'Womens Speaking Justified': The Feminine Quaker Voice, 1662-1797", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6 (1987), 61-77 (pp. 72-74); and Isabel Rivers, "'Strangers and Pilgrims": Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative', in *Augustan Worlds: New Essays in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by J. C. Hilson, M. M. B. Jones, and J. R. Watson (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), pp. 189-203 (pp. 200-01).

⁷ Carol Edkins, 'Quest for Community: Spiritual Autobiographies of Eighteenth-Century Quaker and Puritan Women in America', in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 39-52 (p. 49).

⁸ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'Conversion and the Language of Autobiography', in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. by James Olney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 42-50 (p. 46).

⁹ Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 7.

mimetic, since in them we hear both the individual voice and the voice of the community'.¹⁰

This chapter contributes to these discussions of the relationship between the individual and the community in spiritual autobiographies. In particular, it builds on Felicity Nussbaum's analysis of Quaker and Methodist women writers in *The Autobiographical Subject* and develops her suggestive comments on female self-inscription and collective identity. However, I take issue with Nussbaum's presentation of late eighteenth-century autobiographies as the products of an ideological tradition that are 'repetitive and predictable' once 'the narrative gaps close'.¹¹ Instead, I argue that Quaker and Methodist women writers continue to engage in both productive and disabling ways with the pre-determined narratives of spiritual identity circulating within their religious communities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This approach is consistent with Patrick Riley's argument that the conversion narrative is never a stable text, but rather articulates an ongoing process of becoming in which 'identity is both coagulated and dissolved by radical subjective change'.¹²

In contrast to critical interpretations that understand spiritual autobiography as a consistent genre of 'conversion', I argue that these spiritual histories are shaped by the specific religious cultures from which they emerge. The principles and practices of the spiritual fellowship, its theorisations of the relationship between the self and the world, the role and status of women preachers, the function of autobiography, and the literary culture in which their writing circulated all influence women's self-articulations. These texts therefore foreground the role of social networks and religious fellowships in women's lives and enable an exploration of the multiple subject positions available to women within two distinct spiritual communities. They trouble the relationship between autonomy and social agency and suggest that spiritual belonging is a powerful mode of female public selfhood. Yet they also reveal that the spiritual ideals of altruism, self-abnegation, and fellowship may undermine

¹⁰ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 142.

¹¹ Nussbaum, p. 177.

¹² Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 4.

women's capacity for self-possession. However, taken as a group, the collective experience of these writers testifies to the personal and social value of affiliation, identification, and connection.

'As Face Answered Face in a Glass': Quakerism's Divided Self

Quietist faith and silent fellowship

The Quakers (or Society of Friends) were the most successful of the nonconformist sects to arise during the Interregnum, gathering support in the northern counties of Britain in the 1650s and spreading across the globe by the end of the century under the leadership of George Fox (1624-1691).¹³ Their faith was founded on personal revelation, universal salvation, exaltation of the spirit over the letter, and a commitment to a priesthood of all believers. Fox believed that each individual was born with the light of Christ (or spiritual seed) within and the ability to be inspired by the Holy Spirit in prophecy.¹⁴ From the early eighteenth century, Quakerism was influenced by quietism. Scottish Quaker Robert Barclay (1648-1690) articulated this position most systematically in *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678).¹⁵ Barclay claimed that 'Testimony of the Spirit is that alone, by which the true Knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed' and maintained that humanity was 'fallen, degenerated, and dead'.¹⁶ For Barclay, the inner light was not intrinsic to the self but a part of the divine. It could only enter if the individual achieved a state of absolute spiritual passivity (or absence of being) through an introspection that silenced human will and desire.¹⁷ In her autobiography, Quaker minister Jane Pearson articulates this ideal in her struggle 'to die to self', echoing the

¹³ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-95), I, 186-208; and Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁴ Watts, I, 188-93.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the ways in which Barclay's thought impacted the Quaker movement, see William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 391; and Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 181-82.

¹⁶ Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 4th edn (London: T. Sowle, 1701), pp. 4-6.

¹⁷ Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1921), I, 59-60.

words of preacher Caroline Hopwood ‘thou know’st I nothing am, and I would nothing be’.¹⁸

This conception of the self placed a premium on self-knowledge and created a culture of self-analysis, since selfish motivations had to be scrupulously disentangled from divine intuition or direction. However, a suspicion of personal desire also had the potential to produce feelings of division or lead to a loss of self. John Morris helpfully articulates this paradox in his analysis of the *Journal* of John Woolman:

The primacy of private experience is unquestioned; only in the recesses of the self is the truth made known, for reality centers there. But in the experience of that reality the self becomes, paradoxically, selfless; the ego is burned away, abolished.¹⁹

Furthermore, Barclay’s distinction between the natural and the divine alienated individuals from their ‘fallen’ human form. These feelings of self-estrangement are revealed in the images of abject bodies that populate the autobiographies, such as Jane Pearson’s confession that ‘I now abhorred myself as in dust and ashes’.²⁰ Quietism privileged silent worship over text or ministry, since Barclay characterised the Scriptures as ‘a *secondary Rule, subordinate* to the *Spirit*’ and feared that preaching might become a substitute for the indwelling light and a passive waiting on God.²¹ Barclay advised that preaching should be performed ‘without Humane Commission or Literature’ and conceptualised the preacher as a vessel for whom God acted as ‘mouth and wisdom, tongue and utterance’, to take Catharine Phillips’s expression.²² Theorising the role of the preacher in this way presented both an opportunity and a challenge for women Quakers. The anti-intellectualism of quietism and its positive re-evaluation of selfless qualities (conventionally gendered feminine) meant that women had psychological and social access to a public voice. However, women preachers were acutely anxious that their speaking represented an excess of ego incompatible

¹⁸ Jane Pearson, *Sketches of Piety, in the Life and Religious Experiences of Jane Pearson* (York: William Alexander, 1817), p. 16; and Caroline Hopwood, *An Account of the Life and Religious Experiences, of D. Caroline Hopwood, of Leeds, Deceased* (Leeds: E. Baines, 1801), p. 56.

¹⁹ John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 123.

²⁰ Pearson, p. 21

²¹ Barclay, p. 5.

²² Barclay, p. 11; and Catherine Phillips, *Memoirs of the Life of Catherine Phillips* (London: James Phillips, 1797), p. 19. With the exception of the title page of the *Memoirs*, Phillips’s name is generally spelt Catharine (rather than Catherine) in eighteenth-century sources.

with true self-abnegation and feared that self-expression compromised their spiritual integrity.

The Quaker emphasis on self-scrutiny, self-erasure, and silent worship seems to represent a starkly individualist model of spiritual identity. However, the Quakers discovered sympathy in silence as part of an intersubjective community founded on telepathic connection and a profound psychic response to the spiritual condition of others.²³ The individual consciousness united with the ‘soul’ or ‘seed’ embedded in humanity and preachers imagined that their public testimony connected with a correspondent witness of truth in the congregation. In their spiritual autobiographies, the preacher Catharine Phillips explains her impulse to ‘sympathize with the seed of life’ and Jane Pearson declares ‘I feel united to the suffering seed, wherever they are, or of whatever society they may be’.²⁴ However, it is ambiguous whether this collective identity was forged through positive shared values or created in opposition to the potentially contaminating outside world. Barclay argued that ‘the chief end of all Religion, is, to redeem Man from the spirit and vain Conversation of this World, and to lead into inward Communion with God’.²⁵ Catie Gill notes that memoir replaced prophecy as the dominant literary form within Quakerism at the beginning of the eighteenth century.²⁶ This development reinforces the argument that during the period of quietism the Quakers withdrew from a productive dialogue with the ‘World’ into a self-enclosed and solipsistic monologue.

Opposition, integration, and insularity

Paradoxically, the insular sectarianism fostered by quietism coexisted with the Quakers’ emergence as an intellectual and commercial elite. The industrialist Abraham Darby III and banking families such as the Barclays, Lloyds, and Gurneys exemplified this capacity for economic success and social integration. At its inception, Quakerism was characterised by its stridently anti-authoritarian stance and separatist identity that was sustained in the face of persecution and imprisonment.

²³ Jones, *Later Periods*, 1, 62-63 and 236.

²⁴ Phillips, p. 99; and Pearson, p. 23.

²⁵ Barclay, p. 14.

²⁶ Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 3-4.

However, in the aftermath of the Toleration Act (1689) George Fox placed greater emphasis on group discipline. He introduced a hierarchy of local monthly, regional quarterly, and national yearly meetings, established a recorded ministry, and attempted to oversee the spiritual condition and the personal and financial conduct of his followers.²⁷ The collective identity of the Quakers was also sustained, at least in part, through literary regulation. The Morning Meeting (established in 1672) was responsible for considering works submitted for publication and ensuring their adherence to Quaker doctrine. However, historians debate whether this form of censorship represented a repression of individualised voices into homogeneous conformity, a means of creative guidance, or the shared desire of author and community to establish a collective consciousness through text.²⁸

The eighteenth century is characterised as a period of institutional consolidation for Quakerism, accompanied by a loss of missionary zeal and a decline in the number of followers.²⁹ The policy of birthright membership and endogamous marriage, together with the sect's customs of plain dress and distinctive speech, provided a 'badge' of unification and a protective 'hedge'.³⁰ However, the inwardly focussed spiritual fellowship bred worldly success. As Max Weber argues, 'membership of the community' guaranteed an individual's 'creditworthiness' in the public imagination and fostered a disciplined work ethic.³¹ Commentators suggest that prosperity posed a far greater threat to religious integrity than persecution during this period, leading the Quakers to regard the world as a dangerous source of contamination and to cultivate a 'cloistered psychology'.³² The tensions between religious integrity and social success and the disjunction between the mythologies of Quakerism's past and the realities of its worldly present were sources of confusion and distress for its followers. Mary

²⁷ Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 283-85.

²⁸ David J. Hall, "'The Fiery Tryal of their Infallible Examination': Self-Control in the Regulation of Quaker Publishing in England from the 1670s to the mid 19th Century", in *Censorship & the Control of Print in England and France 1600-1910*, ed. by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1992), pp. 59-86 (pp. 81-82); and Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 125-26.

²⁹ Michael Watts notes that 'while the population of England had trebled between 1715 and 1851, the number of Quaker adherents had more than halved'. Watts, II, 81.

³⁰ Jones, *Later Periods*, I, 170.

³¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 206.

³² Sheila Wright, *Friends in York: The Dynamics of Quaker Revival 1780-1860* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1995), p. 15.

Anne SchimmelPenninck (née Galton), cousin of Priscilla Hannah Gurney, articulates the difficulties experienced by the daughters of 'gay Quakers' in her autobiography.³³ She suggests that, in fashionable society, she suffered 'the descent of the mental eye from seeking, however imperfectly, the sun in the heaven above, to fix itself on the glittering gewgaws of the earth beneath'.³⁴

Economic success and social integration had theological consequences for the sect as well as a psychological impact on its followers, due to the frequent interactions between Quakers and other Christian denominations in secular life. Michael Watts, Rufus Jones, and Sheila Wright suggest that Quakerism was particularly influenced by the Evangelical Revival, a Church of England movement that was part of an international attempt to return to the 'religious fervour of an earlier age'.³⁵ Watts argues that during the period of quietism Quakers remained resistant to revivalist ideals, despite the presence of former Methodists like Mary Dudley within its itinerant ministry.³⁶ However, by the 1830s Quaker evangelicals dominated the movement under the leadership of Joseph John Gurney, whose Quaker faith had been influenced by friendships with leading members of the Evangelical party such as William Wilberforce.³⁷ Joseph John Gurney opposed the central tenets of quietism by privileging Scripture over spirit and articulating a social role for Quakerism in the mission to save souls and instigate moral reform.³⁸ On issues such as education, prison reform, and the anti-slavery campaign the Quakers were a dominant political force, compounding their economic and social success with an intervention in public affairs.³⁹ Philanthropic movements enabled the Quakers to reconcile their secular and spiritual selfhood and eased their collective conscience as they laboured under the burden of increasing wealth.⁴⁰ However, the coexistence of the contradictory impulses of evangelical activism and quietist insularity produced schism within the movement and caused conflict in the lives and religious identities of many of its followers.

³³ Elizabeth Isichei, 'From Sect to Denomination among English Quakers', in *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements*, ed. by Bryan R. Wilson (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 161-81 (p. 163).

³⁴ Mary Anne SchimmelPenninck, *Life of Mary Anne SchimmelPenninck*, ed. by Christiana C. Hankin, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1858), I, 111.

³⁵ Watts, I, 394; Jones, *Later Periods*, I, 276-87; and Wright, pp. 21-30.

³⁶ Watts, I, 461-62.

³⁷ Jones, *Later Periods*, I, 495-511.

³⁸ Watts, I, 463.

³⁹ Wright, pp. 69-107.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 214-15.

Spiritual equality and feminine difference

Quakerism was founded on a principle of spiritual and sexual equality, encapsulated in Keith Thomas's claim that it was 'among the Quakers that the spiritual rights of women attained their apogee' during the Civil War period.⁴¹ George Fox argued that inequality was a consequence of the 'fall', not a condition of creation, and suggested that unification with Christ restored women and men to pre-fall perfection as 'helps meet, *Man* and *Woman*'.⁴² Fox embodied this condition in his own marriage to Margaret Fell, the preacher, polemicist, political campaigner, and 'mother of Quakerism'.⁴³ As a result of his commitment to immediate personal revelation, Fox was also an ardent supporter of women's preaching. He suggested that St Paul's words, 'let your women keep silence in the churches' and 'I suffer not a woman to teach', were contingent on the specific individuals and churches addressed rather than universal prohibitions.⁴⁴ However, as Phyllis Mack argues, the authority of the early woman preacher was dependent upon her capacity to transcend her sexed body and identify with male figures from the Old Testament.⁴⁵ Therefore, while spiritual equality resulted in a liberating erasure of sexual difference it nonetheless introduced a disjunction between self-identification as a woman and a prophet.⁴⁶

As a result of religious consolidation and social integration, the woman prophet who preached on street corners during the 1650s and 1660s was replaced in the 1670s with the 'mother in Israel'.⁴⁷ During the eighteenth century, the 'mothers in Israel' embodied the values of quietism in their 'modesty, compassion, privacy, domestic order' and 'passivity'. They were valued primarily as 'ministers, moral arbiters, or

⁴¹ Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), 42-62 (p. 47).

⁴² Catherine M. Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism: Handmaids of the Lord* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), pp. 154-55; and George Fox, *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles, Letters and Testimonies* (London: T. Sowle, 1698), p. 323.

⁴³ Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism*, 3rd edn (York: Ebor Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Elaine Hobby, 'Handmaids of the Lord and Mothers in Israel: Early Vindications of Quaker Women's Prophecy', *Prose Studies*, 17 (1994), 88-98; I Corinthians 14. 34; and I Timothy 2. 12.

⁴⁵ Phyllis Mack, 'Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism, 1650-1665', in *Witnesses for Change: Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, ed. by Elisabeth Potts Brown and Susan Mosher Stuard (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 31-63 (p. 43).

⁴⁶ Mack, 'Gender and Spirituality', p. 50.

⁴⁷ Mack, 'Gender and Spirituality', p. 55.

helpmeets' rather than prophets or political activists.⁴⁸ Female authority was therefore based on feminine difference rather than sexual equality, resulting in both losses and gains in women's spiritual status.⁴⁹ Critics of consolidation argue that the increased emphasis on organisation resulted in a gendered division of labour. The women's meeting remained subservient to its male counterpart and female duties of monitoring behaviour, undertaking family visits, dispensing charity, and engaging in reformist activities reinforced women's confinement within the domestic sphere. However, the meetings also imagined a role for women in church government and fostered their organisational skills and sense of solidarity. The church therefore operated as a 'third sphere', mediating between public and private and allowing women a field of action outside the home.⁵⁰ By the end of the seventeenth century, as Phyllis Mack argues, women experienced a more rigid approach to gendered identity and understood themselves as self-conscious actors with political agency grounded in their femininity.⁵¹ In the late 1690s, a letter from the Lancashire quarterly women's meeting was circulated on both sides of the Atlantic. The letter reveals the positive identity of these 'mothers in Israel' in their collective self-image as 'valliant Souldiers of Jesus Christ', armed with 'the sword of his Eternal Spirit', and crowned 'with the helmet of Salvation'.⁵² This radical masculine persona suggests that these 'mothers in Israel' could also clothe themselves in Christ's 'Armour of Light', offering spiritual counsel, dispensing charity, and speaking as prophets in their own voices.⁵³

Secular models of femininity and the figure of the female philanthropist also influenced the eighteenth-century incarnation of the 'mother in Israel'. These patterns of spiritual and sexual identity rested on an essentialism that reinforced female stereotypes, presenting women as the more compassionate and self-sacrificing sex and hardening the distinction between the public and private spheres. However, in

⁴⁸ Phyllis Mack, 'In a Female Voice: Preaching and Politics in Eighteenth-Century British Quakerism', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 248-63 (p. 251).

⁴⁹ Christine Trevett, *Quaker Women Prophets in England and Wales 1650-1700* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), pp. 14-17; Wilcox, pp. 235-55; Hobby, 'Handmaids', pp. 89-90; and Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 274-76.

⁵⁰ Linda Wilson, *Constrained by Zeal: Female Spirituality amongst Nonconformists, 1825-1875* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 210.

⁵¹ Mack, *Visionary Women*, pp. 274-76.

⁵² 'A Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration', transcribed by Milton D. Speizman and Jane C. Kronick, *Signs*, 1 (1975), 231-45 (p. 245).

⁵³ 'Women's Declaration', p. 245.

practice, philanthropy and reform often blurred these boundaries. Political action could be presented in religious and moral terms and the uncontaminated domestic realm could be conceived as an ideal space from which to launch a social critique. Nineteenth-century Quakers, such as the abolitionist Elizabeth Heyrick and the prisoner reformer Elizabeth Fry, drew not only on the public prominence of their seventeenth-century ancestors but also on the organisational skills, charitable fervour, and public speaking of their more immediate eighteenth-century forebears.⁵⁴

Catharine Phillips (1727-1794): 'Publick Combatant' and 'Mother in Israel'

The Quaker autobiographer and transatlantic preacher Catharine Phillips emerges in the *Memoirs of the Life of Catherine Phillips* (1797) as a prophet and a reformer. Her self-conception is shaped by an imaginative connection to Quakerism's past and an engagement with images of female piety circulating in the present. In contrast to many of her peers, Phillips's self-portrait is confident and consistent. She integrates social and familial existence with spiritual transcendence, imagines an interconnection between her inward condition and external history, and expresses her spirituality through practical activism and a transatlantic ministry.⁵⁵ She identifies with the iconic Quaker prophets of the seventeenth century, yet she also aligns herself with the figure of the 'mother in Israel' and insists on women's central role in maintaining discipline and harmony within the movement. In addition, Phillips reconciles her life of freedom, action, and radical agency with conventions of feminine modesty. Blending the figure of the 'mother in Israel' with the secular ideal of republican motherhood enables her to imagine a model of prophecy consistent with domestic womanhood. Phillips manages, in Barclays words, to participate in the 'Conversation of this World' and retain an 'inward Communion with God'.⁵⁶ She therefore challenges the insularity of quietism and creates a public identity that draws on both secular and sacred models of female selfhood.

⁵⁴ Mack, 'Female Voice', pp. 249 and 258; Kenneth Corfield, 'Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker', in *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, ed. by Gail Malmgreen (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 41-67; and Louis Billington and Rosamund Billington, '"A Burning Zeal for Righteousness": Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1820-1860', in *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, ed. by Jane Rendall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 82-111.

⁵⁵ My reading develops Phyllis Mack's suggestive comments on the *Memoirs*. See, Mack, 'Female Voice', pp. 252-54.

⁵⁶ Barclay, p. 14.

In her life writing, Phillips demonstrates an ability to connect her inward condition to external events. This combination of pragmatism and mysticism, physical experience and religious transcendence, resists the quietist separation between the human and the divine. Phillips was born into the movement and infused with its values as the daughter of a second-generation Quaker minister. During her childhood, itinerant ministers lodged in her home in Dudley and she frequently read to her father 'the experiences and sufferings of faithful martyrs, and of our worthy friends'.⁵⁷ In the *Memoirs*, her decision to follow in his footsteps as an itinerant preacher is presented as an adherence to her spiritual destiny, as she remarks, 'I saw early for what station I was designed in Christ's church' (p. 14). This interconnection between faith and family is sustained in later life, as she imagines that her marriage to 'helpmate' William Phillips at the age of forty-five is the work of 'Providence' (p. 210). Between 1753 and 1756, Phillips toured Britain, Ireland, and Holland and travelled over eight thousand miles across America as an integral member of the 'transatlantic Quaker culture'.⁵⁸ In her text, the literal travels and the spiritual pilgrimage stand in metonymic relation, revealed in her comments on her experience in the aftermath of her conversion:

I was now brought into my own heart, which, by reason of the irregularity of its passions and inclinations, might well be compared to an uncultivated wilderness; through which I must travel, and wherein I must receive the law for the ordering of my outward conduct: and O! the seasons of hunger and thirst, the tossings and perplexities. (p. 13)

The inner landscape is figured as a primitive territory in need of God's cultivation and discipline. It is viewed through the eyes of the missionary, as Phillips linguistically connects her spiritual condition and her imminent international travels. She understands her heart metaphorically as an 'uncultivated wilderness' and finds spiritual fulfilment through her literal and physical excursions.

Phillips defines the 'family' of Quakerism in flexible terms. She attaches herself to the tradition of martyrs and prophets encountered in her childhood reading and imagines a continuity between past icons and contemporary preachers. This sense of connection is enabled by her faith in a universal truth, shared light, and common

⁵⁷ Phillips, p. 6. In this section, further references to the *Memoirs* are given after quotations in the text.

⁵⁸ Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1770-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 9.

history. At times, Phillips's veneration of Quakerism's past produces feelings of nostalgia. She contrasts the wavering commitment and decline in numbers in this 'season of ease' to an idealised moment before her birth:

When many great and distinguished persons and characters, bore testimony to the Truth as it is professed by us, as they were thereto called of God; whose light shone brightly, and very conspicuously through their great and numerous sufferings. (p. 264)

In the slippage between 'us' and 'they', Phillips establishes her connection to these eminent martyrs and attaches herself to a history that predates her own. However, Phillips resists her feelings of religious belatedness by imagining herself as a militant remnant of Quakerism's past. Her decision to become a minister is presented as a conscription, which results in her entry into 'the list of publick combatants in the Lamb's army' (p. 21) and a life labouring 'under the direction of our holy Captain, Christ Jesus' (p. 266). This self-image is reminiscent of the Lancashire women's collective self-presentation as 'valliant Souldiers of Jesus Christ'.⁵⁹ Throughout the *Memoirs*, Phillips repeatedly reveals her sense of spiritual equality and asserts the value of female ministry. In her response to male opposition to her preaching in Cambridge, she notes, 'the Lord God hath given me the "tongue of the learned;" although I had it not by education' (p. 276). She recalls a yearly meeting at Penrith that was 'attended by several able ministers of the male sex' but where 'it pleased the wise Master of the solemnity to employ them but little, and to lay the weight of the service upon the females' (p. 156). However, rather than moments of 'radical discursive discontinuity' in which gendered consciousness erupts into the text, Phillips's defence of her preaching on the basis of female authority is allowed to coexist with her masculine self-image.⁶⁰

Phillips is never paralysed by her identifications with the past, but instead draws on historical models of spiritual identity in order to inspire practical interventions in the present. In the account of her transatlantic spiritual mission, she identifies with the female pioneers of Quakerism. She presents herself and her companion Mary Peisley as intrepid explorers in a remote landscape, 'surrounded, for aught we knew, by bears, wolves, and panthers' (p. 81) and fording 'swamps and deep creeks' (p. 70). She

⁵⁹ 'Women's Declaration', p. 245.

⁶⁰ Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 203.

proudly notes that 'no women-ministers had visited part of this country before us' (p. 83) and highlights that her party are 'the first from Europe' (p. 78) to travel to the more remote Quaker settlements. Phillips revives the missionary spirit of seventeenth-century Quakerism and rejects quietist insularity. During her Atlantic crossing she preaches to an eclectic congregation, consisting of 'a South Carolina woman and her negro maid, a man and his wife, the one a German and the other a Swiss; a Scotch schoolmaster, our captain and his brother of French extraction, if not born in France' (p. 63).

In general, Phillips aligns herself with the 'mothers in Israel' of the 1670s (rather than the female prophets of the Interregnum) and seeks to distance Quakerism from its associations with the millennial groups of the Civil War era. When she encounters a group of Ranters at a quarterly meeting in Hampton she accuses them of being 'deluded spirits' and 'exceedingly wild in their imaginations' with 'wild disorderly appearances' (pp. 112-13). In contrast, she styles herself as the preserver of harmony and seeks to restore 'the hedge of discipline' (p. 196) to the Quaker societies in America. Back home, she encourages Friends to attend the London meeting that is understood as a means to stretch 'the line of discipline over such among us who walk disorderly' (p. 195). As Rebecca Larson and Phyllis Mack outline, Phillips became intimately involved in the transatlantic campaign to establish a women's yearly meeting in London from 1746 to 1784.⁶¹ In her comments on women's responsibilities in the *Memoirs*, Phillips anticipates Mary Wollstonecraft in her attempt to establish motherhood as a public as well as a private role. She argues that in the yearly meeting 'as mothers of children and mistresses of families' women 'have an extensive service to attend to, and ought to be concerned so to discipline their families, as to be able to answer the several queries relative to their situation' (p. 289).

Phillips exploits this feminised model of authority in order to fashion a public voice and a political identity. On a visit to Philadelphia in March 1755 she engages directly in 'publick or political affairs' (p. 139), arranging a meeting with Quaker members of the Pennsylvania assembly. She advises them in her preaching to withdraw from office during the French and Indian wars in order to preserve their pacifist principles.

⁶¹ Larson, pp. 229-30; and Mack, 'Female Voice', p. 256.

This political act is presented as a spiritual intervention ‘consistent’ with her ‘office as a minister’ and Phillips stresses that neither herself nor her companion are guilty of ‘improperly intermeddling with the affairs of government’ (p. 140). However, while Phillips seems to distance herself from the public sphere, she also envisages a role for women in state affairs. In Pennsylvania, Phillips becomes involved in Quaker peace negotiations with the Indian delegation:

Several of their women sat in this conference, who, for fixed solidity, appeared to me like Roman matrons. They scarcely moved, much less spoke, during the time it was held; and there was a dignity in the behaviour and countenance of one of them, that I cannot forget. I was informed that they admit their most respected women into their counsels. (p. 142)

In this moment of identification, Phillips displaces her self-conception as the dignified and civilising presence within politics onto her characterisation of the Indian women, temporarily transforming them into the Roman matrons associated with the ‘mother in Israel’. Harriet Guest notes that during the 1770s and 1780s the Roman matron provided a powerful secular image of female intervention in the public sphere.⁶² Paula McDowell argues that the Quaker women preachers of an earlier era imagined themselves on a continuum with the nation state and the body politic.⁶³ But Phillips appears closer to the oppositional politics of the Roman matron, as she implies that women’s distance from the public realm renders them the ideal preservers of human integrity and the values of the religious community.

However, this fantasy of a passive yet influential female role, consistent with an ideology of separate spheres and the values of quietism, is only ever an imagined ideal or a rhetorical strategy for Phillips. In the *Memoirs*, she seeks to establish her modesty, virtue, and propriety. She foregrounds her identity as a wife and stepmother and inoculates her account against the accusation that she might ‘travel for pleasure, or to gratify a roving or curious disposition’ (p. 143). She stresses that her public duties were accomplished ‘in as short time as I could’ so that she can ‘spend the spare time afforded me in the exercise of my duty in my own family’ (p. 143). However, the domestic ideal presents a stark contrast to Phillips’s life of radical action and energetic vocal performances. This discontinuity is evident in the comments of the

⁶² Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 236-51.

⁶³ McDowell, p. 180.

Quaker diarist James Jenkins, who compares Phillips to 'a great Autocratix' (drawing on the image of excessive female power presented by the Russian 'autocratix' Catharine II).⁶⁴ Jenkins's description 'unsexes' Phillips, as he claims that she possessed 'masculine features, and mien, upon the whole, the reverse of that feminine softness, which to our sex is so generally attractive'.⁶⁵

In her *Memoir*, Phillips suggests that her ministry is consistent with the self-abnegation and anti-intellectualism of quietism. She claims that on taking up the role of preacher she relinquished her youthful desire for knowledge and creative self-expression. She recalls her decision to 'desist' from reading history, poetry, and philosophy in order to work out 'the salvation of my immortal soul' (p. 8) and also notes that she 'dropped' her 'pen in regard to verses' (p. 18). However, in fact, Phillips published tracts on subjects as diverse as the co-ministry of Methodists and Quakers and the price of grain. In 1794 she wrote a poem to George III, reviving a tradition of political female prophecy and yet also speaking in her own voice.⁶⁶ Phillips inherits her sense of an outwardly focussed spiritual mission from her radical Quaker ancestors. But her impulse to address audiences and readers based on her own research into religious, economic, and political issues establishes her as an important antecedent to the Quaker reformers of the nineteenth century.

Phillips identifies herself as the soldier of Christ on a pioneering journey through a spiritual and geographical wilderness. Yet, at the same time, she attempts to fashion a public role consistent with secular models of femininity. In practice, her religious activism and public agency are in conflict with both quietism and a domestic ideal. But nonetheless, as a result of her flexible understanding of affiliation she is able to imagine an identity rooted in the traditions and values of the Quaker movement and rooted in her immediate social context. She establishes a powerful connection to the legacies of Quakerism, updating its female icons for the late eighteenth century. In her

⁶⁴ *The Records and Recollections of James Jenkins*, ed. by J. William Frost (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), p. 118. Quoted in Mack, 'Female Voice', p. 252.

⁶⁵ Jenkins, p. 262.

⁶⁶ Catharine Phillips's principal publications include: *Reasons Why the People Called Quakers Cannot so Fully Unite with the Methodists* (London: James Phillips, 1792); *An Address to the Principal Inhabitants of the County of Cornwall ... on the Mining Concerns of that County* (Stourbridge: J. West, 1792); *An Epistle to Friends in Ireland* (Dublin: Robert Jackson, 1776); and *The Happy King. A Sacred Poem: With Occasional Remarks Respectfully Addressed to George the Third* (London: the author, 1794).

self-identification as a remnant of the past, Phillips seizes the authority to intervene in her religious, social, and political present. In the process, she fulfils both a personal ambition and a collective mission.

Mary Dudley (1750-1823): 'Inscribed on my Heart and Acknowledged with My Pen'

In contrast to Catharine Phillips's confident self-image and public voice, preacher Mary Dudley presents herself in *The Life of Mary Dudley* (1825) as a 'vessel' absorbed within a silent and passive spiritual fellowship.⁶⁷ Dudley's fragile sense of self is complicated by Quakerism's negative construction of personal identity, desire, and language. She expresses her identity in a register of blankness, absence, and silence and enacts her desire for self-abnegation in a text that perpetually 'unwrites' the self that is written. She presents her abandonment of Anglicanism and Methodism and her union with the Quakers as an inevitable conclusion to her spiritual pilgrimage rather than a self-determined plot. She also lives in a state of dependency, as her altruism precipitates a loss of self and personal autonomy is replaced by divine obedience. Yet, paradoxically, this open model of relational selfhood precipitates a desire for self-enclosure in private worship and Quaker fellowship. In her self-construction as a passive vessel she is perpetually confronted with the threat of contamination and a fear of social integration. This insularity is both at odds with the spiritual influences of her past as an Anglican and a Methodist and unsustainable in light of her itinerant mission. In this autobiography of an '*instrument*' (p. 211), Dudley therefore reveals both the pressures of living in a state of detachment and the psychological and social consequences of losing oneself in relation.

Dudley was born into an Anglican family and her Quakerism was therefore a voluntary affiliation rather than an inherited connection. Before discovering the Quakers at the age of twenty-three, Dudley attended 'various places of worship among the dissenters' (including the Baptists) and joined the 'Methodist Society' while continuing to worship as a member of the Church of England (p. 4). In her

⁶⁷ Dudley, p. 24. In this section, further references to the *Life* are given after quotations in the text.

autobiography, Dudley's self-image is characterised by lack, absence, and loss throughout this period. She comments that around the age of eighteen 'my mind was like a blank, waiting to be filled up' and later, with the Baptists, she describes herself as 'a vacuum unfilled' (pp. 3-4). In the Methodist meeting she recalls that 'when, from the force of example, I did speak, my little strength was rather diminished than increased' (p. 18). Dudley reveals that John Wesley responded to her attraction to the Quakers with characteristic zeal, entreating her in a letter to 'go not near the tents of those dead, formal men called Quakers! Keep close to your class, to your band, to your old teachers; they have the words of eternal life!'.⁶⁸ However, Dudley rejects the model of spirituality advocated by the Methodists and is disturbed by the group's commitment to hymn-singing, personal testimony, and a vocal ministry.

Dudley presents the Quaker meetings as a liberation from the compulsive testimony and regulatory eye of Methodism's 'teachers', noting that 'especially in silence, did my Spirit feed, as it did in deep awful retiredness, when no eye saw me' (pp. 4-5). The Methodist's 'active zeal' is, for Dudley, 'irreconcilable with that self-abasement, and utter inability to move without holy help, which I experienced' (pp. 17-18). She transforms the imagery of the 'blank' and the 'vacuum' from an expression of isolation into an ideal spiritual identity, claiming that she finds herself a Quaker by spiritual instinct alone:

Though ignorant of the way Friends had been led, or some peculiar testimonies they held, the day of vision clearly unfolded them one after another, so that obedience in one matter loosened the seal to another opening, until I found, as face answered face in a glass, so did the experience of enlightened minds answer one to the other. (p. 20)

In this model of faith, the Quaker community consists of a collection of individuated and enlightened minds bound together by a shared vision and a telepathic connection. In a moment of simultaneous self-assertion and self-effacement, Dudley declares 'I want not a *name*' (p. 14). However, elsewhere she comments 'were there no Quaker on earth, I must be one in principle and practice' (p. 18). Unlike her experience with the Methodists, she is never compelled to 'answer' to the community nor shaped by the 'force of example'. Her spiritual experience and relationship to God is enhanced and developed by the Quakers. For while religious speculation is understood as a

⁶⁸ *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, ed. by John Telford, 8 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1931), V, 335.

‘labyrinth’ and a ‘circuitous path’ that might leave her ‘in many a maze enveloped’ (p. 240), Quakerism unfolds as a natural and inevitable pathway.

This idealised connection articulates a powerful model of spiritual sympathy, forged in corporate silence and self-abnegation. However, it also reveals the passivity of Dudley’s self-conception. Catharine Phillips’s identification with the ‘mother in Israel’ allows her to act as a vessel for the word of God and address audiences in a masculine style on public issues. In contrast, for Mary Dudley speaking is dependent on an absence of self, as she recalls that the first time she spoke in a public meeting ‘the words impressing my mind, seemed to run through me as a passive vessel’ (p. 24). In a powerful image of breathless inarticulacy, she presents the period before her entry into the ministry as a time when ‘*I fainted in my sighing*’ (p. 26). Dudley’s sense that preaching depends on the suppression of personal desire also inspires feelings of self-alienation, evident in her remark that ‘I am afraid of no one but myself, and I desire always to suspect that enemy *self*, lest, on any occasion, it should take the *lead*’ (p. 86). In contrast to the ‘active zeal’ of the Methodists, she insists on the ‘self-abasement’ of her faith (pp. 17-18) that is revealed in her paradoxical self-construction as the silent preacher.

For Dudley language is neither a means of public intervention, as it is for Catharine Phillips, nor a mode of self-expression, as it is for Priscilla Hannah Gurney. Instead, words are synonymous with false collectivism, egotistical self-promotion, and, above all, indolent dependence. She fears that ‘thirsting for words’ reveals a spiritual self that has relinquished an independent pilgrimage and sustains itself ‘on the labour of others’ (p. 99). Following a meeting in Hillsborough, she laments ‘I thought the season clouded from too great a desire for words, which tended to obstruct the arising of the spring in the manner it might have been known’ (p. 94). Language is therefore understood as a barrier to spiritual connection and self-knowledge rather than as a medium for furthering enlightenment. In her autobiography, Dudley articulates her self-defeating aspiration to preach the value of silence so that individuals will ‘*feel* as well as *hear*’ (p. 66). She fulfils this ideal in Holland by preaching to Dutch congregations without a translator. For in the ultimate act of self-negation, the aim of the Quaker preacher was to render preaching itself redundant.

As a consequence of her passive self-construction and her suspicion of language, Dudley is unable and unwilling to conceptualise her writing as an instance of self-expression. She imagines her text as a testament to the Lord's help, 'deeply inscribed on my heart, and acknowledged with my pen' (p. 303). She therefore theorises her writing as a movement from God, to heart, to hand that circumvents the mind and the imagination. This absence of a writing subject at times results in expressions of inarticulacy, evident in her reflections of 1796 that she is not 'even qualified to keep any little sketch of what I go through from day to day, as if all that is once passed was gone from my remembrance, by fresh exercise continually occurring' (pp. 216-17). This transitory and passive self is suspended in a perpetual present without personal history or desire. The individual becomes the product of her altruistic services, reviving only 'when any thing is put into it for others, which for a season refreshes and sweetens' (p. 217). Self-articulation collapses into silence in the autobiography of a 'poor vessel' (p. 62), as Dudley seeks to ensure that 'the *power* not the *instrument* is kept in view' (p. 211).

This model of relational selfhood is embodied in the structure of the autobiography, in which the narrative of Dudley's daughter and the comments of the local Quaker congregation frame her personal memorandums. The appendix, 'A Testimony of Southwark Monthly Meeting Concerning Mary Dudley, Deceased', rehearses and reinforces Dudley's interpretation of her experience. It quotes extensively from the *Life* that precedes it and ventriloquises Dudley's words in the 'voice' of the community. In her comments on her upbringing, Dudley suggests that she was 'a constant attendant' on the ceremonies of the Established Church but was also 'allowed to enter into most of the vain amusements of the world, to which my natural disposition greatly inclined' (p. 2). Likewise, the community presents Dudley as the child of parents who 'strictly' attended 'to the ceremonies' of the Church of England and allowed their daughter 'to enter into most of the vain amusements of the world, to which her natural disposition greatly inclined' (p. 345). This textual collaboration confirms the self-portrait of the 'author' and produces a collective history of an individual life. It also provides a symbolic resolution of Dudley's lifelong struggle to reconcile her attachment to her husband, three children, and five stepchildren with her duties to the religious community and her commitment to God. From the outset she theorises private affection as an egotistical assertion of personal desire and a potential

inhibition to her spiritual development. She notes, 'I now began, in the addition of children, to feel my heart in danger of so centering in these gifts, as to fall short of occupying in the manner designed, with the gift received' (pp. 30-31). On one occasion, she attempts to foreshorten a ministerial tour and return home. However, she records in a letter to her husband '— rebellion — rebellion sounded through my heart, and I grew so ill, that I dared not proceed' (pp. 83-84), registering the psychological and physical distress in the dashes and repetitions that disrupt her text.

In addition to the conflict between faith and family, Dudley also experiences a tension between her quietist conception of the world as a potential source of contamination and her passionate commitment to the conversion of souls.⁶⁹ Like Catharine Phillips, Dudley's desire for the spiritual enlightenment of others extends across national and geographic boundaries and finds expression in her extensive ministerial travels through Western Europe. In a letter of 1813, written during the Napoleonic wars and recorded in the *Life*, Dudley addresses the Quakers she visited in France in 1788:

This sweetly banding influence, being from time to time renewed, hath made, and still keeps you, as epistles written in my heart; and while there has been no communication with the tongue or pen, desires, yea fervent prayers have often ascended. (p. 284)

The telepathic connection is communicated in the air and written on the body in an image of non-verbal inscription expressed in a letter. However, this spiritual union is an extension of the Quaker fellowship rather than the heterogeneous collection of citizens of the world that Phillips addresses while crossing the Atlantic. Dudley suggests that she has a 'universal' desire to extend her Christian fellowship 'from sea to sea, and from shore to shore' (p. 289) and frequently preaches to mixed congregations that included Methodists and Evangelicals. However, she also admits that she experiences 'desires peculiarly earnest for the people among whom we dwell, and bonds of spiritual unity with those of our brethren, who in a measure of pure life, we feel as bone of our bone' (p. 289). The ethereal global community, presented in the letter to France, is undermined by the nationalistic and physical image of the 'bone of our bone' that reveals Dudley's fears of spiritual miscegenation.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Later Periods*, I, 277-78.

At first glance, Dudley's desire for the Quakers to be a spiritual elite housed in an 'impregnable fortress' (p. 237) echoes Catharine Phillips's portrayal of the sect as 'a chosen people of God, abiding in our tents'.⁷⁰ However, Phillips suggests that the Quakers are an army 'under the direction of our holy Captain, Christ Jesus' and she is one of the 'publick combatants'.⁷¹ In contrast, Dudley's metaphors express her desire for an embattled retreat, as she confesses 'often does my spirit long that we, as a people, may gather more and more into this precious habitation, out of that spirit which produces tumult, or mingles with it' (p. 238). Dudley's self-construction as a passive vessel conflicts with her desire for social connection or inter-denominational interaction. She imagines 'mingling' as an inevitable source of contamination and instead desires sympathetic absorption within a homogeneous fellowship. Dudley's position is a negative modification of the anti-authoritarianism of her Quaker ancestors and Phillips's radical self-image, as she loses herself in collective transcendence and sectarian retreat in an autobiography on the verge of silence.

Priscilla Hannah Gurney (1757-1828): 'Lazarus Raised from the Grave'

Priscilla Hannah Gurney's claim to a unique spiritual identity and a self-determined future presents an alternative to both Catharine Phillips's identification with the past and Mary Dudley's defensive absorption within the present. As the great-granddaughter of Robert Barclay and a distant relation of the Gurney family of Earham Hall, Priscilla Hannah Gurney had a personal connection to Quakerism's past and present and its quietist and evangelical strains. However, in her *Memoir*, Gurney liberates herself from spiritual legacies and earthly genealogies by writing an anti-conversion narrative and imagining herself as unprecedented, miraculous, and, above all, self-made. She charts her spiritual progression through birthright Quaker membership, conversion to Anglicanism, and her subsequent return to Quakerism. She undergoes a process of self-deconstruction in order to imagine herself as the child of God, expressed through the metaphors of rebirth and resurrection that dominate her narrative. Through writing a detailed self-analysis, she disentangles herself from disabling family relationships and launches a critique of the concept of 'common'

⁷⁰ Phillips, p. 266.

⁷¹ Phillips, pp. 21 and 266.

models of spiritual experience. Gurney therefore fails to construct her Quaker identity as a public role like Catharine Phillips, but she also avoids the self-abnegation experienced by Mary Dudley. Instead, she establishes herself as the rebellious heroine of her own dramatic narrative and imagines a sympathetic connection to her readership.

The Quaker emphasis on personal spiritual experience that underpins Gurney's sense of herself as a unique subject also enables her to reject Quaker narratives of conversion in her autobiography. Gurney structures her history in opposition to the expected pattern, remarking that her *Memoir* charts an inverted journey 'not indeed from darkness to light, but from a measure of true light unfaithfully maintained, to a mournful degree of darkness and confusion'.⁷² The 'true light unfaithfully maintained' refers to Gurney's feelings of religious hypocrisy, which she experiences while living with her worldly parents who demonstrate little of 'the life of true religion' (p. 2). The period of 'darkness and confusion' recalls her conversion to Anglicanism, which follows her mother's marriage to a member of the Church of England and provokes thoughts of suicide.

Gurney's *Memoir* is pervaded by images of literal and figurative displacement and structural collapse. She is haunted by visions of broken and circular pathways, appearing to herself 'on the brink of a deep abyss' (p. 48) and imagining that she is being 'conducted into a labyrinth' and a 'narrow enclosure' (pp. 97-98). These images seem reminiscent of Mary Dudley's presentation of her union with the Quakers as a release from the 'circuitous path', 'labyrinth', and 'maze'.⁷³ However, for Dudley spiritual progression takes place instinctively, whereas, for Gurney the images of enclosure are transmuted into symbols of personal endeavour. She recounts the dream of a fellow Quaker who feels compelled to lead Gurney 'along a narrow, winding, and gradually ascending path, round a high mountain' until she 'gained the summit' (p. 105). William Wordsworth's literary pilgrimage in *The Prelude* may provide a more immediate counterpart, as the poet articulates his self-creation in a language of

⁷² Priscilla Hannah Gurney, *Memoir of the Life and Religious Experience of Priscilla Hannah Gurney* (Bristol: J. Chilcott, 1834), p. 64. In this section, further references to the *Memoir* are given after quotations in the text.

⁷³ Dudley, p. 240.

‘broken windings’ and ‘circuitous’ paths.⁷⁴ Like Wordsworth, Gurney’s journey is both spiritual and vocational. For once she is ‘restored’ (p. 113) as a Quaker she relocates to the community of Coalbrookdale and establishes herself within a network of women preachers.

Gurney’s determination to express her personal history in opposition to available narratives of spiritual experience is accompanied by a recurrent emphasis on her ‘extraordinary’ (xviii) and ‘remarkable’ status (xxi). In the *Memoir*, she imagines herself as a miraculous and unprecedented figure:

One whose case seemed without parallel on scripture record, unless they should be authorized to compare it, in a spiritual sense, with Lazarus in a literal one; when he was said to have lain dead four days, and unfit to be exposed to human inspection. (pp. 102-03)

Her connection to Lazarus is characterised as much by difference as equivalence. She distinguishes between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘literal’ and retains her singularity, even as she aligns herself with a miraculous biblical parallel. In the aftermath of her failed attempt to take an overdose, she builds on these images of rebirth and her sense of ‘providential’ rescue. She imagines herself ‘resembling’ Lazarus ‘raised from the grave’ and identifies with Christ, commenting that his ‘character, as the Resurrection and the Life, manifested within me to the restoration of my soul’ (pp. 112-13). The *Memoir* includes numerous images of a return to origins, for at the height of her crisis of faith Gurney recalls:

The state of my mind, if not wholly that of a complete chaos (requiring to be created anew in Christ Jesus) much resembled that of a ruined building, in which scarcely one stone had been left upon another. In this state of devastation, I have since seen the safety, of being willing to abide in deep humility, until it might please the great Master-builder to begin and carry on his own gradual work. (pp. 69-70)

Gurney’s self-presentation as a ruined building reveals her desire to return to her foundations. She suggests that the false and empty spirituality of her early life must be destroyed through this self-devastation so that she can be remade as the work of the ‘great Master-builder’. These images of self-abjection seem to echo Mary Dudley’s self-presentation as an absent blank. However, Gurney’s accounts of ruination are confident self-assertions motivated as much by personal as spiritual concerns. For in

⁷⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1850, ll. 274 and VI. 752.

this fantasy of origins, Gurney establishes herself as the creation of her heavenly father rather than the child of her earthly mother.

The *Memoir* is a history of Gurney's troubled relationship with her mother as well as a record of her relationship to God, since she imagines her narrative as an illustration of 'the dangers of a defective education' (p. 152). She implies that her mother's re-marriages (first to a cousin 'after the manner of the Church of England' and then to a man outside of the Quaker society) are responsible for her painful transition from 'true light' to 'darkness and confusion' (pp. 16-18). The immediate motivation for Gurney's decision to join the Church of England is a passionate friendship with an Anglican woman, who claims that 'it would be the happiest day of her life if she could see me at the font' (p. 31). But Gurney makes clear that the underlying cause is the family's socialisation outside of the Quaker circle, in an oblique criticism of her mother's transgression from the custom of endogamy. Her mother's second marriage results in the family's relocation to Bush Hill. This new home is presented in the *Memoir* as 'a spot beautified by nature and high cultivation, being ornamented with gardens, paths, and groves, which became for more than two years, a sphere of innocent delight to her children' (p. 17). Drawing on her reading of *Paradise Lost* (which takes place around this time), Gurney imagines Bush Hill as a prelapsarian Eden. However, the 'cultivation' and 'ornament' reveal the worldly temptations of these new surroundings, as she notes that 'the growth of the evil seed overspread the good, in the indulgence of desires after forbidden things' (p. 17). Gurney suggests that this problem is compounded by her mother's third marriage and the family's removal to Bath that occurs when she is fifteen. The accusatory strand in Gurney's narrative is taken up retrospectively in the autobiography of her cousin Mary Anne Galton. In the account of her childhood, Galton opposes her angelic cousin Priscilla whose words 'descended like dew on the soul' and who 'wanted but wings to be an angel', to the corruptive force of Gurney's mother.⁷⁵ Recalling her visits to her cousin's home, Galton remarks:

When at Seagrove, I was like a fly which, entangled in the pot of honey the allurements of which he cannot resist, yet feels his feet clogged, so that he can no longer walk his way; his wings entangled, that he can no longer soar; his spiracles oppressed, that he can no longer breathe the fresh air.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ SchimmelPenninck, I, 227.

⁷⁶ SchimmelPenninck, I, 131.

With scientific accuracy worthy of a daughter of a member of the Royal Society (the influence of her father's microscope evident in her revision of the fly in the honey-pot motif), Galton expresses the moral, spiritual, and physical contamination she experiences in staying with the Gurney/Watson family.

Galton's response to her 'angelic' cousin reinforces the sense conveyed in the *Memoir* that Gurney develops a highly performative spiritual identity and seeks to control her self-image in order to shape the reactions of others. This impulse towards self-dramatisation is inconsistent with Phillips's identity as a spiritual remnant of a collective past and Mary Dudley's displacement from her own narrative. Instead, Gurney draws on literary models of identity, recounting her 'taste for romance or adventure' (p. 19) in her reading and confessing that she is 'constitutionally prone' to 'fabricating romantic combinations of events and circumstances' (pp. 12-13). Her *Memoir* demonstrates her love of the dramatic scene, as she comments that her rejection of Anglicanism took place on a 'long solitary walk' during 'a severe storm of thunder and lightning' (p. 62). Likewise, Gurney's thoughts of suicide seem a melodramatic plotting as much as an intended action. She reveals that 'many dismal contrivances, indeed, employed my imagination, concerning the putting an end to my temporal existence, without the possibility of its being discovered to be my own act' (p. 88). Gurney's decision to become a plain Quaker provides an alternative to the role of tragic heroine. She adopts the costume and the lines, speaking in the 'simple style of thou and thee to a single person' (p. 78) and noting with relish her family's fears that she will be 'making myself a spectacle indeed in the eye of the world' (p. 68). The *Memoir* suggests that Gurney understands these acts as both an expression of her spiritual commitment and a rebuke to her mother's lifestyle. Revealingly, she remarks that 'I acutely felt their repugnance to be addressed by me in this language; which, though that of my mother's and my own early education, had been dismissed in our family since the days of my childhood' (p. 78).

In Gurney's hands the spiritual autobiography becomes a vehicle through which to explore family relationships and is simultaneously a form of therapy, self-vindication, and critique. However, this fusion of family and spiritual drama is also a deliberate challenge to the cultural and literary practices of her religious community. Unlike

Phillips's communal history and Dudley's collaborative life, Gurney's autobiography foregrounds her authorial identity and is a vehicle for self-expression. Gurney advocates an individualised model of spirituality and refuses to provide 'a mere abstract account of religious experiences' disconnected from 'outward events' (xx). She resists communal paradigms, arguing that 'different individuals are very differently dealt with, as to the time, manner, and degree of the visitation of divine light and life to their souls' (p. 9). In her preface, she launches an attack on the institutional regulation of spiritual expression:

Although the Morning Meeting may be justly considered as the valuable guardian of that unity of publicly-avowed doctrine, which ought never to be infringed by professed members of our Religious Society; I have been ready to doubt its obligation to exercise so much of a disposition to make alterations, as has at times been manifested, as to the eligibility of any peculiar style or object pursued by the writer, if not in any degree inconsistent with the main object of its consideration. (xx)

Gurney imagines an ideal in which the 'Morning Meeting' acts as a 'guardian' of doctrinal unity, but nonetheless permits self-expression on religious matters. She implicitly rejects the Methodist practice of accumulating representative and exemplary lives and instead asserts the value of an individual's 'peculiar style' over the common model.

In contrast to the Methodist women writers Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth, Gurney fears self-proliferation, reader identification, and replication of her experience in the lives of others. She discourages her reader from following her spiritual path, which she characterises as one of 'continued rebellion' (xix) and 'reiterated disobedience' (xxi). She also confesses that her concern that others might pursue 'the like course' had initially 'discouraged' her from writing (xxi). Throughout the *Memoir*, Gurney presents literary encounters as dangerous negotiations in which the reader is subject to invasion and spiritual integrity is potentially undermined. The works of Joseph Priestley and David Hartley are imagined as an 'inviting bait' from which she is 'providentially' preserved:

I longed to join individuals in the family, in reading these so highly commended as religious and philosophical works; but such a salutary fear was granted to possess my mind, that when the books were brought out, I constantly left the room, standing awhile with my hand on the door, to feel whether I might not find freedom to return; but this was never allowed me: which I received as a mark of providential care towards me. (p. 72)

Gurney suggests her spiritual integrity is protected from philosophy by a combination of internally felt constraint and a closed door, as if books present a physical threat to their readers. She wishes to defend individual expression against the homogenising impulse of the 'Morning Meeting'. However, she replaces the authoritarian control of an earthly spiritual leadership with an alternative form of textual regulation. Divine authority is internalised as self-censorship and God preserves her from a model of religious truth based on intellectual engagement and free inquiry, exemplified by the figure of Joseph Priestley.

Gurney's personal and spiritual history attempts to deconstruct established textual patterns and resists the regulatory impulse to absorb the specificities of an individual life within the common religious model. She connects a narrative of inward experience to a unique familial context and registers the role of external influences and personal relationships on her spiritual development. In her *Memoir*, she distances herself from the traditions of the movement and the inherited religion of her family. As a result, she refuses to assimilate herself within a communal past like Catharine Phillips or engage in a spiritual retrenchment in the present like Mary Dudley. Nonetheless, she imagines autobiography as a means of social connection that provides 'caution, counsel, or encouragement' (p. 127) and addresses those 'whose path is equally exposed to an opposition of sentiments and examples from those around them' (p. 129). Gurney therefore writes herself into an oppositional community and finds an answering face in the glass. For while Catharine Phillips discovers a multitude of faces and Mary Dudley casts no reflection, for Priscilla Hannah Gurney the figure in the mirror is undoubtedly a face of her own making.

‘Rivers Did Indeed Flow from Heart to Heart’: The ‘Methodised’ Self and Collective Reformation

In contrast to the dissenting community of the Quakers, Methodism was founded on an impulse to revive the Church of England from within. It emerged as part of the transatlantic Evangelical Revival of the 1730s and was understood by its founders Howell Harris, George Whitefield, and John and Charles Wesley as a faith that could be practised within an Anglican framework.⁷⁷ This claim was not always believed by the Establishment or accepted by their followers, but it was only after the death of John Wesley in 1791 that Methodism moved into a separatist position and finally split from the Church of England in 1795.⁷⁸ For Mary Fletcher, Mary Tooth, and Sarah Ryan, Methodism was a voluntaristic association rather than an inherited faith. They were followers of John Wesley’s Arminian Methodism, which emphasised the importance of good works and the hope of Christian perfection. This was in contrast to the Calvinist Methodism of George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, which was distinguished by a doctrine of predestination and an emphasis on free grace.⁷⁹ Throughout their lives, Fletcher, Tooth, and Ryan considered themselves as members of the Church of England. This identity was reinforced by their connection to the Arminian Methodist and Anglican clergyman John Fletcher of Madeley (1729-1785), who was a close friend to Wesley and an important influence during the Revival.

As Michael Watts argues, there were striking resemblances between eighteenth-century Methodism and seventeenth-century Quakerism. This included a common emphasis on itinerant evangelism, group organisation, and the physical responses of their congregations.⁸⁰ As an Arminian, Wesley also shared the Quaker commitment to universal redemption and an aversion to a ‘legalistic religious system’.⁸¹ He established inward experience as a source of religious truth and privileged the rights of the individual conscience over the institutional authority of the Church in his

⁷⁷ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991-2000), I, 206.

⁷⁸ Watts, I, 440.

⁷⁹ Watts, I, 428-34.

⁸⁰ Watts, I, 407.

⁸¹ Watts, I, 427.

‘experiential theology’.⁸² However, he resisted the radical Quaker position that the ‘inner light’ was a greater authority than biblical text and argued instead that personal revelation had to be tested against Scripture, reason, and experience in order to be at once subjective and objective.⁸³ Wesley’s ‘firmly articulated schema of the Christian life’ was more formulaic than Quakerism’s conception of spiritual progress, since the believer passed through recognisable stages of repentance (including faith, justification, and assurance) on the way to Christian perfection.⁸⁴ Forgiveness of sin (or justification) was understood as a gift of God’s grace. Christian perfection was not attained through absolute spiritual passivity, solitary introspection, or silent communion, as the Quaker Robert Barclay advocated. Instead, works were a condition of salvation, spiritual progress was enhanced through personal testimony, and the dangers of enthusiasm were avoided through self-comparison with the spiritual experience of others.⁸⁵

Therefore, in contrast to the Quaker emphasis on individualistic piety, silent telepathic connection, and transcendence of the physical body, Methodism was premised on collective reformation, oral and textual exchange, and religious empiricism. This insistence on the value of articulating spiritual experience in a language of feeling meant that Methodist women did not share Quaker anxieties that personal testimony was a potentially inauthentic self-assertion or a moment of egotistical display. The commitment to sensible experience also enabled Methodist women to understand their faith through the body, expressed in the kinaesthetic and sensational imagery of their life writing that presents a striking contrast to the abject bodies of the Quaker autobiographies. In addition, the Methodist conception of faith as a movement between feeling hearts allowed Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth to conceive of their spiritual mission in universal and pragmatic terms. The ‘active zeal’ of the Methodists (that was a source of anxiety to Mary Dudley) encouraged women to transform the world through spiritual ministry, philanthropy, and moral reform. For, in their missionary fervour, these women revived the spirit of seventeenth-century Quakerism rather than mirroring the insularity of their quietist Quaker contemporaries. However,

⁸² Richard E. Brantley, *Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984), p. 5.

⁸³ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, I, 208.

⁸⁴ W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972), p. 76; and Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, I, 234.

⁸⁵ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, I, 207-09.

while faith enabled self-affirmation and social participation, for Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth entry into the Methodist Connexion also represented a moment of assimilation into a corporate spiritual identity. Life writing was integral to this process of 'methodisation', acting as a form of self-discipline and spiritual accounting and establishing a common model of faith for emulation. The self-representations of Dudley and Gurney were as much psychological explorations as spiritual narratives, designed to write the author out of isolation. By comparison, Methodist personal histories were intended to reform through the transmission of shared values between reader and writer in a process of self-proliferation.

Quaker women preachers spoke from within a priesthood of all believers and drew on an established tradition of female prophecy. In contrast, their Methodist counterparts were identified as recipients of an '*extraordinary call*'.⁸⁶ Quaker women experienced a moment of self-transcendence in their public speaking, but Methodist women preachers understood themselves as gendered subjects who spoke in their own voices. This embodied position was a source of social anxiety for Mary Fletcher, who perceived preaching as a potential threat to femininity. But for Ann Freeman, her 'extraordinary' status became a means of feminist self-assertion. Quaker women preachers experienced losses and gains in the increased emphasis on social integration and community discipline at the end of the seventeenth century. However, for Methodist women, Wesley's death in 1791 and the consolidation of the movement into 'a hierarchical, church-like organization' resulted in a decline in status and a heavily circumscribed sphere of action.⁸⁷ As a consequence, many women preachers broke with the Wesleyan Methodists and joined groups such as the Bible Christians, Primitive Methodists, and Independent Methodists. These sects separated from the Wesleyan Conference between 1795 and 1815 in protest against the constraints of Wesleyan church government and advocated a return to revivalist techniques, such as female preaching.⁸⁸

Methodism was conservative in intention but at times it was also radical in effect. The Methodist model of spiritual identity invested Fletcher, Tooth, and Freeman with a

⁸⁶ *Letters of John Wesley*, V, 257.

⁸⁷ Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 20.

⁸⁸ Valenze, pp. 74-98; and Watts, II, 30-35.

confident self-consistency. It reassured them of the value of articulating their personal experience, fostered a sense of social belonging, and established them within a local spiritual fellowship and a transatlantic revival. This powerful collective identity was a vehicle for rebellion against debilitating domestic circumstances and provided a communal sanction for a life of public service and independent travel. However, these women also experienced institutional pressures to conform to a pre-existent narrative of selfhood and spiritual progress. The role of exemplary subject demanded self-discipline and communal regulation. It could also lead to self-displacement in the attempt to embody the values of the community or shape self-expression to the needs of others. The spiritual, social, and literary networks in which these Methodist selves were embedded could therefore act as sources of constraint as well as support.

A 'religion of the heart' and a discursive fellowship

The Methodist Connexion consisted of an elaborate organisational hierarchy of class and band meetings overseen by the Wesleyan Conference. These gatherings were designed to foster group identity, encourage spiritual progress, and establish community discipline. Frederick Dreyer argues that Wesley conceived of Methodism as a 'club', perhaps modelled on Locke's ideal of the church as a voluntary organisation that founded its collective authority in the consent of its members and was held together by contractual ties.⁸⁹ The communitarian aspects of eighteenth-century Methodism are highlighted by Earl Kent Brown's study of over one hundred Methodist women's narratives. He reveals that the majority cited the influence of preachers, class members, and friends and family as the source of their Methodist commitment.⁹⁰ In the bands, classes, and in print, Wesley solicited spoken and written testimony in order to test the validity of his doctrines and inspire and discipline his followers.⁹¹ He explicitly rejected the corporate silence of Quaker worship, noting in a letter to Mary Dudley in 1772 that 'to be silent in the congregation of His people is wholly new, and therefore wholly wrong'.⁹² In addition, Wesley contradicted the Quaker impulse towards self-transcendence and understood the effects of the Holy

⁸⁹ Frederick Dreyer, 'A "Religious Society Under Heaven": John Wesley and the Identity of Methodism', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 62-83 (pp. 79-82).

⁹⁰ Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), p. 229.

⁹¹ Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, I, 214.

⁹² *Letters of John Wesley*, V, 334-35.

Spirit on the soul as analogous to physical sensation, arguing that ‘the mind feels *what* it believes’.⁹³

This emphasis on discursive exchange, affective relationships, and sensible experience was exemplified by the Methodist ‘love feast’, in which faith was transmitted from feeling ‘heart to heart’ in an atmosphere of heightened emotionalism. The ‘feast’ combined spiritual conversation and a shared meal and often resulted in collective conversions accompanied by trembling, crying, and fainting. Methodist Hester Ann Rogers’s description of a Dublin ‘feast of love’ in 1784 was typical of participants’ accounts:

After several, who spoke with great freedom and simplicity, a poor penitent besought us with tears to pray for her. The kindlings of love, which had been felt before, now became a flame in every believing soul; and when fallen on our knees, the power of God descended of a truth; every corner of the house was filled with cries.⁹⁴

Faith became a contagion fuelled by physical proximity, evident in Rogers’s reflections that in her class of teenage girls ‘many of them began to feel awakenings’ simultaneously.⁹⁵ G. J. Barker-Benfield connects the ‘culture of sensibility’ to Methodism through a shared emphasis on ‘sensational psychology’, ‘identification with the interests of women’, and ‘the interweaving of both movements with consumerism’.⁹⁶ In addition, both Methodism and sensibility were predicated upon a belief in collective reformation within a culture of feeling and invested sensation with spiritual value. These qualities are encapsulated in E. P. Thompson’s portrayal of Methodism as a ‘religion of the “heart” rather than of the intellect’.⁹⁷ However, this association with a language of feeling meant that the movement was vulnerable to attack as an anti-social enthusiasm, as Jon Mee argues.⁹⁸

This sociable and affective model of faith enabled Methodists to imagine themselves as part of a worldwide religious community and experience their conversion as a

⁹³ Frederick Dreyer, ‘Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley’, *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 12-30 (p. 21).

⁹⁴ Hester Ann Rogers, *The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers* (London: J. Vickerman, 1840), pp. 165-66.

⁹⁵ Rogers, p. 169.

⁹⁶ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 72 and 268-69.

⁹⁷ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 399.

⁹⁸ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 49-50.

universal revival repeated from heart to heart.⁹⁹ Social boundaries were eroded and cross-class allegiances flourished, exemplified by the egalitarian friendship between the gentleman's daughter Mary Fletcher and the ex-domestic servant Sarah Ryan. Interdenominational cooperation was widespread, evident in reform projects such as the British and Foreign Bible Society that began in 1804.¹⁰⁰ In the words of Unitarian Catharine Cappe, the Society softened 'the animosities of discordant, contending sects and parties'.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the insularity and passivity of eighteenth-century Quakerism, Methodists expressed their faith through charity and reform. Mary Tooth participated in missionary, temperance, and sewing meetings, visits to the sick, and collections for the poor, therefore suggesting that the Methodist mission frequently expanded from the salvation of souls to the healing and nourishment of bodies.¹⁰²

Self-discipline, communal regulation, and exemplary lives

Wesley's spiritual egalitarianism coexisted with a commitment to self-discipline and communal regulation. Methodism permeated the personal and social lives of believers in its insistence on self-improvement and the redemptive value of time. Spiritual diaries were a crucial 'technology' for inculcating self-regulation, evident in the Methodist pocket book for 1818 that belonged to Sarah Lawrence, the niece of Sarah Ryan.¹⁰³ Preserved within the John Rylands archive, Lawrence's pocket book was printed at Methodist Headquarters and was designed for the owner to enter a weekly account of both time spent and financial expenditure.¹⁰⁴ This juxtaposition of spirit and commerce is consistent with Max Weber's argument that the 'Protestant ethic' supported capitalist production.¹⁰⁵ Individualised self-scrutiny found its public corollary in community discipline, encapsulated by the climate of regulation and surveillance cultivated in the Leytonstone orphanage run by Mary Fletcher and Sarah Ryan. The timetable was modelled on John Wesley's school at Kingswood and was extraordinarily rigid. Fletcher notes that 'we are much led to teach them never to do

⁹⁹ Hindmarsh, pp. 62-72.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond G. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 18.

¹⁰¹ Catharine Cappe, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Mrs. Catharine Cappe* (London: Longman, 1822), p. 377.

¹⁰² 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MSS A-N.

¹⁰³ Hindmarsh, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Lawrence, *Methodist Pocket Book* (1818), Fletcher-Tooth, Box 16, MS I.

¹⁰⁵ Weber, pp. 1-36.

any thing but what they can give God a reason for for this reason we never use the term play' and 'as little as possible let them be from under our eye'.¹⁰⁶ Commentators argue that the interconnection between conduct and faith and the emphasis on testimony in the class and band meetings produced 'a new sense of interiority' and opened up 'a new space of moral and spiritual agency'.¹⁰⁷ However, these practices also incorporated individuals within a collective model of identity and insisted on the internalisation of institutional demands.

Methodism's literary culture was integral to this process of 'methodisation'. To take Michael Mascuch's terms, 'print opened individual horizons' but also imposed 'its form and its contents on the reader's imagination'.¹⁰⁸ Isabel Rivers argues that Wesley 'completely controlled' the 'literary environment' of his preachers. He edited and abridged works for *A Christian Library* from 1749 to 1755 and published his own writings, including his *Journal* that was printed in instalments from 1739 to 1791.¹⁰⁹ Wesley warned against reading authors with conflicting viewpoints and prided himself on producing harmony between texts in his collections.¹¹⁰ Writing to his young protégé Elizabeth Mortimer (née Ritchie) in 1774, Wesley cautioned that 'it might be safest for you chiefly to confine yourself to what we have published. You will then neither be perplexed with various sentiments nor with various language'.¹¹¹ In this model, her reading becomes an act of absorption and practical application rather than a comparative critique. Wesley's commitment to a reading practice based on sympathetic identification was consistent with Methodism's pedagogical style. Hindmarsh argues that Methodism was 'a mimetic religious culture' in which charismatic leaders inspired adulation in their followers and readers were encouraged to emulate exemplary subjects.¹¹² As the editor of the *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Mortimer* commented, 'a love of holiness, a constant and an intense desire to be

¹⁰⁶ Mary Fletcher, 'An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Work of God in Latonstone, Essex, 1763', Fletcher-Tooth. The Fletcher-Tooth catalogue misattributes this fragment to Sarah Ryan, but it is written in Mary Fletcher's handwriting. See Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen: American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1991), p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ Hindmarsh, p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ Mascuch, p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ Rivers, 'Methodist Narrative', pp. 193-94.

¹¹⁰ Isabel Rivers, 'Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 127-64 (p. 153).

¹¹¹ *Letters of John Wesley*, VI, 125.

¹¹² Hindmarsh, p. 155.

conformed to the great Pattern of perfection, is the characteristic principle of the regenerated mind'.¹¹³ However, this tendency to foreground earthly models meant that human relationships and textual identifications had the potential to mediate between an individual and her God. This process is revealed in Mary Tooth's response to reading *The Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Walsh*, as she notes 'I long to be like him to walk and talk with God all the day long and can say as he did I would walk with thee my God as Enoch did'.¹¹⁴ The autobiographical subject is the mediating term between Tooth and the scriptural ideal, as she expresses her longing for spiritual connection through a desire to 'be like him'.

The Wesleyan pattern of religious experience was articulated and reinforced in the lives serially published in the *Arminian Magazine* from 1778. Wesley solicited, selected, and edited those fit for publication in line with his literary ideal that he characterised in a letter of 1781: 'I avoid, I am afraid of, whatever is peculiar, either in the experience or the language of any one. I desire nothing, I will accept of nothing, but the common faith and common salvation.'¹¹⁵ This policy of exclusion is exemplified by Methodism's treatment of the eminent preacher Sarah Ryan, who was a friend of John Wesley and co-founder of the Methodist community at Leytonstone. 'Mrs Ryan Life' is the transcript of Sarah Ryan's history that she dictated to Mary Fletcher around 1767. The narrative recounts Ryan's experience of domestic service, her series of abusive 'marriages', and her conversion to Methodism. However, it could not be assimilated into the Methodist literary canon. Instead, Ryan's place in Methodist history was shaped by a series of fragments published in the *Arminian Magazine*, including a fifteen-page spiritual narrative in 1779, a selection of correspondence between herself and Wesley serialised in 1782, and diary extracts that appeared in 1806.¹¹⁶ Ryan's experience was therefore valued as a series of isolated 'instants' that illustrated stages on the path to salvation. But publication was premised on making the details of her life invisible in order to ensure readers did not identify

¹¹³ Elizabeth Mortimer, *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Mortimer*, ed. by Agnes Bulmer (London: John Mason, 1836), p. 34.

¹¹⁴ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS F, 23 February 1800; and *The Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Walsh*, ed. by James Morgan (London: H. Cock, 1762).

¹¹⁵ Rivers, 'Methodist Narrative', p. 194; *Letters of John Wesley*, VII, 67.

¹¹⁶ Fourteen letters from Ryan to Wesley and eight letters from Wesley to Ryan appeared in the *Arminian Magazine* throughout 1782.

with ‘a thoughtless, flirting trigamist’, as Wesley’s biographer Luke Tyerman termed Ryan in 1870.¹¹⁷

The ‘extraordinary call’: Methodism’s women preachers

Women Methodists played a prominent part in the Evangelical Revival of the 1740s and 1750s, but their status within the spiritual and literary fellowship of Methodism remained ambiguous throughout the eighteenth century.¹¹⁸ In public meetings, private conversation, and personal correspondence, they engaged in testimony, prayer, and exhortation.¹¹⁹ Wesley appointed women to leadership positions in the class and band meetings, corresponded regularly with numerous female followers, and published their writings in the *Arminian Magazine*. Margaret Jones notes that ‘forty per cent of the (auto) biographical material published under Wesley’s editorship relates to women’.¹²⁰ Their stories were never systematically solicited like the male preachers of Methodism, but through their relationships with John Wesley women negotiated a place in print.

The women preachers of the 1760s and 1770s tended to be the band and class leaders of the 1750s, whose preaching was an accidental evolution of their existing leadership.¹²¹ Wesley responded to this development with a mixture of anxiety and pragmatism, revealed in his response to Sarah Crosby’s confession in 1761 that her class meetings were attracting audiences of over two hundred people. Wesley advises Crosby to begin her meetings with the caveat that ‘you lay me under a great difficulty. The Methodists do not allow of women preachers; neither do I take upon me any such character. But I will just nakedly tell you what is in my heart’.¹²² This emphasis on spontaneity was a recurrent refrain in Wesley’s advice to women preachers, as he suggested that they should ‘never speak in a continued discourse without some

¹¹⁷ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, 3 vols (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870-71), II (1870), 289.

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of Wesley’s relationships with his female followers, see, Maldwyn Edwards, *My Dear Sister: The Story of John Wesley and the Women in his Life* (Manchester: Penwork, 1980).

¹¹⁹ Chilcote, p. 239.

¹²⁰ Margaret P. Jones, ‘From “The State of my Soul” to “Exalted Piety”: Women’s Voices in the *Arminian/Methodist Magazine*, 1778-1821’, *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), 273-86 (p. 275).

¹²¹ Chilcote, pp. 47 and 239.

¹²² *Letters of John Wesley*, IV, 133.

break'.¹²³ As a result, he blurred the distinction between Methodist preaching and the extemporaneous speaking of the Quakers, evident in the accusations levelled at Mary Fletcher by a member of her congregation that 'yours is a Quaker call'.¹²⁴ However, Wesley defended the Pauline injunction against women's preaching while still recognising the '*extraordinary* call' of individuals.¹²⁵ He distanced himself from the Quakers in his remarks that 'they flatly deny the rule itself, although it stands clear in the Bible. We allow the rule; only we believe it admits of some exceptions'.¹²⁶ Methodist women's authority was therefore premised on their unique status and relationship to Wesley rather than a universal principle or tradition of female prophecy. In contrast to Quaker women's concerns that public speaking represented an excess of ego or clouded the inner light of others, Methodist women's reservations were largely social. They feared that public prominence compromised their femininity and therefore struggled to reconcile their spiritual identities with their sense of social propriety.

The figure of the woman preacher was at the centre of Methodism's internal conflicts that followed the death of Wesley in 1791. At the end of the century, the impatience of some Methodists with the order and discipline of the Wesleyan Connexion resulted in mass expulsions and secessions. This led to the founding of rival Arminian Methodist denominations, associated with militant dissent, freedom of spiritual expression, and the urban and rural poor.¹²⁷ Deborah Valenze argues that female evangelists were closely allied, both in practice and in the popular imagination, with sectarian Methodism. Women's preaching violated the 'increasingly respectable and middle-class model for ministerial behaviour' established by the Wesleyan leadership.¹²⁸ The Manchester Conference of 1803 sought to distance Methodism from women's preaching and issued a restrictive resolution that a woman with 'an extraordinary call' should 'in general, address her *own sex*, and *those only*'.¹²⁹ Linda Wilson comments that in practice many women continued preaching in the period up

¹²³ *Letters of John Wesley*, V, 130.

¹²⁴ *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict of the Rev. John Fletcher*, ed. by Henry Moore, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1818), I, 158. All references to Mary Fletcher's private diary are taken from Moore's edition.

¹²⁵ *Letters of John Wesley*, V, 257.

¹²⁶ *Letters of John Wesley*, VI, 290-91.

¹²⁷ Watts, II, 30-35.

¹²⁸ Valenze, p. 61.

¹²⁹ Chilcote, p. 236.

until 1860 and Mary Tooth's Journal reveals that she addressed classes of both sexes into the 1840s, while still identifying herself as part of the Connexion.¹³⁰ However, more commonly, women preachers found a warmer welcome within sectarian Methodist groups, exemplified by Ann Freeman's experience with the Bible Christians at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This process of institutional consolidation also permeated the historiography of the movement, as the role of first-generation women preachers in the Evangelical Revival was frequently forgotten or suppressed at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹³¹ Sarah Crosby was 'probably the most famous female itinerant preacher' of the 1770s, but her spiritual narrative was only published in 1806 after Elizabeth Mortimer spent two years writing to the editor of the *Methodist Magazine* (successor to the *Arminian Magazine*).¹³² This process of authorised erasure was countered in part by Zachariah Taft's two-volume collection *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women* that was published in 1825 and 1828. Taft attempted 'to snatch from oblivion's gulph' the achievements of women preachers and establish a tradition comparable to the women prophets of seventeenth-century Quakerism.¹³³ However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the woman preacher emerged as a radical and oppositional figure, limiting Methodist women's desire or opportunity for cross-generational identifications.

'All the Family in Heaven and Earth are Married': Spiritual Fellowship in the Life and Writing of Mary Fletcher (1739-1815) and Mary Tooth (1778-1843)

In the life writing of Mary Fletcher and her companion Mary Tooth, the mimetic culture of Methodism shapes the way in which they understand their spiritual identities and engage with their religious and social communities. Methodist conversion enables a radical break with the past, as they imagine themselves 'reborn' within a 'family' of their own choosing. However, in contrast to the self-reinvention

¹³⁰ Wilson, p. 206.

¹³¹ Kent Brown, xv-xvi.

¹³² Kent Brown, pp. 95 and 175-76.

¹³³ Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women*, 2 vols (London: Kershaw and Baynes & Son, 1825-28; repr. Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1992), I, ix and i.

of Priscilla Hannah Gurney, spiritual rebirth represents Fletcher and Tooth's incorporation within a 'methodised' ideal. Their life writing suggests that grounding their faith in a social circle and mediating their relationship to God through earthly attachments allows them to exchange personal autonomy for spiritual dependence. Mary Fletcher presents herself as an exemplary subject and the embodiment of her faith, intertwining her narrative of personal experience and spiritual progress within a history of Methodism. In her spiritual autobiography, she foregrounds her role as a philanthropist and minister's wife and relegates her more radical public identity as a preacher to the privacy of her spiritual diary. In doing so, she establishes herself as a model of Christian womanhood for emulation into the nineteenth century. Fletcher internalises her public persona as the 'Consort and Relict' of her husband John Fletcher and imagines herself as the inheritor and protector of his legacy and the promulgator of his faith. However, while constructing herself as a survivor enables her to orientate herself in her widowhood, it also ensures that her present is determined by the past.

The identities of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth are strikingly interdependent, since Fletcher fashions herself as the author and subject of an exemplary life and Tooth constructs herself as Fletcher's ideal reader. However, while Fletcher's autobiography presents the carefully crafted narrative of a unified subject, Tooth's Journal is an intersubjective personal testimony. Her private reflections compete for space with transcriptions from the writing and preaching of Mary Fletcher and her spiritual circle. Tooth models herself on these exemplary subjects in her everyday life, establishes herself within their revered genealogy in her Journal, and ventriloquises their words in her preaching. In a Journal entry from 1841, Tooth reveals Mary Fletcher's unusual propensity as a child to separate her Bible into 'small parts' and 'conceal it amongst her clothes' in order to ensure that, in Fletcher's words, "'if they burn all the Bibles they shall not have mine'".¹³⁴ This striking image of Mary Fletcher clothed in text is a fitting symbol for her tendency to imagine herself as an exemplary literary subject, whose life is lived in order to be worthy of the spiritual autobiography that she will one day write. However, the concealed scriptural fragments are also a testament to the identity of Mary Tooth. She extends her public role as Fletcher's

¹³⁴ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS N, 6 October 1841.

amanuensis and executrix into her private self-conception and produces a relational identity that is determined by her connection to a Methodist literary icon. Historians have replicated Tooth's textual self-effacement and she remains a neglected figure within Methodist historiography. However, in the final part of my analysis I explore the psychological mechanisms and rhetorical strategies that have led to Tooth's self-willed absence. Tooth's Journal therefore punctures the complacent ideal that literary and social networks are inherently supportive and suggests that, in their lives and texts, women Methodists may be locked together in a cycle of writing and reading, re-writing and re-reading, and endless citation.

*'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me': family ties and
Methodist fellowship*

Mary Fletcher

Methodism enables Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth to liberate themselves from their domestic circumstances and provides consolation for childhood feelings of isolation, alienation, and distress. However, in the lives of both women, the spiritual fellowship is a potential substitute for a personal relationship to God and the Methodist emphasis on self-comparison and emulation produces anxious feelings of doubt and a loss of self-worth. Mary Fletcher's portrayal of her childhood in her autobiography suggests that her relationship with her family is a source of acute psychological disturbance. Like Priscilla Hannah Gurney, Fletcher spends prolonged periods of her childhood living with relatives and her Huguenot family of financial traders fear for her sanity, allegedly threatening her with the madhouse. Fletcher's relationship with her mother appears particularly strained, revealed in her heartbreaking confession that 'I do not wonder my dear mother should not love me as the rest of her children; for I was not only more dull and indolent in every thing I had to learn, but I was proud insolent and disobedient'.¹³⁵ For Fletcher and Gurney, faith becomes a vehicle for independent action and an explanation for family conflict. Fletcher claims she 'found on the one hand disobedience to parents – and on the other disobedience to God' (I, 27) and

¹³⁵ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS I, 11. In this section, further references to 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher' are given after quotations in the text.

peppers her autobiography with the words of Matthew, 'he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me' (II, 5).¹³⁶

Fletcher's criticisms of her parents and their social circle are more explicit than Gurney's oblique commentaries on her mother's corruption. However, Fletcher abnegates herself from responsibility in the conflict, imagining herself instructed by the Holy Ghost and reconfiguring her defiance as a submissive obedience to God. Fletcher notes, 'I was constrained to do things so displeasing to my parents that it appeared to them as if I was obstinate and disobedient and my flech has seemd ready to move on my bones' (I, 7). This disturbing metaphor, that reveals Fletcher's feelings of alienation within her own body, is literalised in a dramatic attempt at suicide or self-harm at around aged ten. Fletcher recalls that it 'occurred to my mind that if Jesus was the son of God I would set my arm bleeding', even though she fears she will 'probably Bleed to death' (I, 7-8). For Priscilla Hannah Gurney death is understood as a stage-managed public performance, whereas, for Fletcher it is a literal gouging of her own flesh. She attempts to cut herself free from the physical connection to her family and identifies with the suffering figure of Christ.

At times, Fletcher expresses her feelings of dislocation within the worldly milieu of her parents in terms highly reminiscent of Gurney's self-dramatisations. However, unlike Gurney's enactment of the role of the plain Quaker, Fletcher's protest remains in the realm of the imaginary. During a visit to Bath at the age of twelve, she recalls:

In the midst of the Ball room I used to think if I knew where to find the Methodists or any who would show me how to please God – I would tear off all my fine things throw them on one side and the other, and run through the fire to them. (I, 9)

In this dramatic fashion crisis Fletcher imagines herself as a martyr in the flames, recalling her fascination as a child with the 'pictures in the Book of Martyrs' and her desire that 'the papists would come and burn me' (I, 4). However, she also presents her connection to the Methodists as the inevitable answer to her familial dislocation and suggests that she discovers a spiritual home on the other side of the fire.

¹³⁶ Matthew 10. 37.

Fletcher frequently articulates her spiritual connection to the Methodist fellowship in a language of kinship. When she is asked by her mother to leave home at the age of twenty-two, she pictures herself 'cast out of my fathers house' (I, 31). Yet she finds that 'all this time the Lord kept me as to outward things like an infant in its mothers arm' (I, 40). During this period she relocated to London and joined the female religious community at Moorfields, where she met her future companion Sarah Ryan. In her autobiography, Fletcher presents this relationship as an alternative maternal connection, revealed in her comment that 'the Lord gave her to me as a mother' (II, 26). However, the women also seem to understand their bond as fraternal and conjugal. Fletcher suggests their 'hearts were united as David and Jonathan' (II, 2) and in a letter transcribed in Fletcher's autobiography, Ryan remarks that 'it seems to me as if the Lord had laid your burden on me as he once committed the care of Mary to Joseph' (II, I).

Fletcher implies that the intimate bond with her 'spiritual mother' (II, 40) and 'friend of my soul' (I, 20) heals the divisions created by her conflicted upbringing when she was a 'heap of inconsistency' (I, 6). She recalls that through Ryan she experiences the interdependence between 'private connections' and 'Divine life' (II, 3). This insight found an earthly embodiment in the orphanage and religious society that Fletcher and Ryan established at 'The Cedars' in Leytonstone in 1763.¹³⁷ The community housed thirty-five children and thirty-four adults, lodged Wesley's itinerant ministers, and was the site of weekly Methodist band and class meetings. In her accounts of Leytonstone in her autobiography, Fletcher revels in her social and spiritual role as 'the Lord's Innkeeper' (III, 10) and 'mother' (III, 11) to her community. She presents the garden of the orphanage 'as a paradise' and aligns herself with the original parents in Eden as one who dwells 'among my own people – a few who love me and who I love' (II, 36). This ideal characterisation functions as a thinly disguised rebuke to the family home that was only a mile away from this alternative community. However, Fletcher also understands the orphanage as a realisation of her spiritual mission. The framework through which she experiences her identity, structures her narrative, and measures her spiritual progress is derived from St Paul's words to Timothy, 'if she have lodged strangers, if she have brought up children, if she have washed the saints

¹³⁷ Mary Clare Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton 1740-1870', *London Journal*, 19 (1994), 119-150 (pp. 126-42).

feet and diligently followed after every goodwork' (IV, 46).¹³⁸ Fletcher expresses her faith through charitable action, public duties, and service to others. Therefore, in contrast to the Quaker narratives, her autobiography is also a record of her 'goodworks'.

Fletcher's desire to translate personal relationships into spiritual terms is developed in the portrayal of her marriage to the Anglican minister and Methodist writer John Fletcher, formerly Jean Guillaume de La Fléchère who moved from Switzerland to England during his early twenties. John Fletcher proposed in a letter in 1781 after fifteen years without contact and, according to Fletcher, twenty-five years after he had 'formed a regard for me' (III, 29). By this time, Fletcher had relocated to Cross Hall in Leeds and was struggling to sustain the community without the assistance of Sarah Ryan, who had died thirteen years previously. In her autobiography, Fletcher suggests that the marriage is the work of 'providence' (III, 28) that is designed to rescue her from an imminent financial crisis. The relationship is understood simultaneously as a joint ministry and a fulfilment of her duty to wash the saints' feet. It enhances her capacity for service, as she notes in her diary that 'my spiritual sphere of action is different. I have in many respects a wider call for action than before'.¹³⁹ John Fletcher had been vicar of Madeley in Shropshire since 1760 and in his parish she led classes and bands, worked in the Sunday school, and visited the sick. John Fletcher shared her sense that their union found fulfilment in a wider human fellowship and spiritual mission, noting in a letter of December 1781 that 'God has found me a partner, *a sister, a wife*, to use St. Paul's language, who is not afraid to face with me the colliers and bargemen of my parish, until death part us'.¹⁴⁰

In her writing, Fletcher incorporates the marriage into her self-created genealogy and imagines it as an extension of her relationship with a female fellowship. Sarah Ryan died thirteen years before John Fletcher's proposal. However, according to Fletcher, her husband envisaged Ryan 'as being a three fold cord with us' and claimed curiously to his wife "'I will be all to thee thy friend Ryan was'".¹⁴¹ This association

¹³⁸ I Timothy 5. 10.

¹³⁹ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 193.

¹⁴⁰ Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor: The Life, Letters, and Literary Labours of the Rev. John William Fletcher* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), p. 499.

¹⁴¹ 'Mrs Ryan Life', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS I, 1.

was perhaps reinforced by the presence of Ryan's orphaned niece Sarah Lawrence (known as Sally) who was adopted by the Fletchers and brought to Madeley on their marriage. In her reflections on her husband, Fletcher comments that 'when looking on Sally he would express he regarded her with the more tenderness because she belong'd to both her and me'.¹⁴² In this highly unorthodox family, John Fletcher is the adoptive father of a child belonging jointly to his wife and her 'spiritual mother' Sarah Ryan, a woman who once wrote in a letter to Mary Fletcher 'as to the union you find with me, and I with you, it is beyond all we ever found with any creature'.¹⁴³ On the twenty-eighth anniversary of her wedding (twenty-four years into her widowhood), Fletcher notes that 'at this hour, I gave my hand and heart to John William De la Flechere'. She continues, 'by faith I now join my hand afresh with his. My Sally, and my friend Ryan too, - We are one in Jesus'.¹⁴⁴ Five years later she adds Mary Tooth to the fellowship, commenting on the anniversary of her wedding that Tooth's friendship is 'a favour' from God.¹⁴⁵ These relationships provide an alternative lineage for Fletcher that takes precedence over reality and compensates for her estrangement from the family of her birth. At the same time, the convergence of these attachments in her writing allows her to understand her marriage as a continuation of the female communities of her past.

Fletcher's practice of grounding her spiritual identity in her connection to Sarah Ryan and John Fletcher deviates sharply from the Quaker aspiration for an individuated relationship to God. At moments, Fletcher echoes the Quaker concern that she is overly reliant on others for her spiritual strength and engaged in a false idolatry of earthly models. This condition is exemplified by Priscilla Hannah Gurney's traumatic friendship with a member of the Church of England, which leads to her becoming 'enslaved' by the 'desire of pleasing one I so much loved'.¹⁴⁶ In the course of her teenage friendship with the Methodist writer Mrs Lefevre, Fletcher appeals to 'the Lord to take away all idolatry out of my affection'. This entreaty is followed by a dream in which she sees the name of Mrs Lefevre written on a wall and juxtaposed with the words "'thou shalt have no other gods but me'" (I, 15). However, Fletcher

¹⁴² 'Mrs Ryan Life', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS I, 1-2.

¹⁴³ Sarah Ryan, 'Correspondence', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 115.

¹⁴⁴ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 254.

¹⁴⁵ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 271.

¹⁴⁶ Gurney, p. 33.

replicates this impulse to adopt spiritual mentors in her later life, noting that when at 'The Cedars' she 'desired' Sarah Ryan 'to a lot me my rules and imployments' (III, 1). As a consequence, in the aftermath of Ryan's death she notes that 'I lost my way and knew not were or what I was for about too years' (III, 9).¹⁴⁷

The anxiety that she has 'placed too much confidence on an arm of flesh' (I, 15) and mediated her relationship to God through an earthly idol recurs in her relationship with John Fletcher. In the period following his death in 1785, she confesses that 'I had lent on him as the ivy on the oke and was now ready to fall down when I saw my self left in an howling wilderness alone' (IV, 8). However, she transforms the 'howling wilderness' of her grief into a beautiful image of natural and spiritual connection in a letter of 1785 addressed to John Fletcher's brother:

I saw I loved in him the Image of my Saviour and thought myself the happiest of women in the possession of the most sympathising and heavenly friend – my saviour bears a due proportion. But it is alleviated by that thought - united in god we cannot be divided no we are of one household still, we are joined in him as our center from whom all the family in heaven and earth are married and as a flower which dies in autumn only returns into the root to come out more beautifull and fragrant in spring so our union is but returned into its center to bud forth both with superior wetness in the eternal summer.¹⁴⁸

The desire for her relationship to John Fletcher to bridge the temporal and heavenly spheres is expressed and fulfilled in her imagery, as she establishes a linguistic connection between 'heaven and earth' as a precursor to reunion in the afterlife. The spiritual realm is linguistically transferred to the natural landscape of seasons, flowers, and roots and the social sphere of marriages, families, and households. Fletcher frees herself from the isolation, conflict, and martyrdom that characterised her early life. However, the dependence of her spiritual identity on eminent others seems to compromise the apparently liberating possibilities for self-reinvention that her Methodist faith inspired.

Mary Tooth

Like Mary Fletcher, Mary Tooth finds emotional support and personal fulfilment in an alternative spiritual family and experiences anxiety in her attempt to mediate a

¹⁴⁷ I have followed the original manuscript spelling here. I think Mary Fletcher means two years.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Fletcher, 'Letter to Mr Henry Lewis De la Fletchere [1785(?)]', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS V, 22-23.

relationship to God through personal attachments. Her manuscript Journal consists of fourteen volumes, sporadically covering the period 1799 to 1842.¹⁴⁹ In the second of these volumes, she suggests that she is motivated to record her family history in response to a rumour that she was ‘a foundling picked up by Mr Fletcher by his door’.¹⁵⁰ However, despite her rejection of this identity, the foundling is an ideal self-image for Tooth, as she attempts to imagine an alternative set of social and spiritual origins. In the brief narrative of her life that is embedded within the diary entries, Tooth separates her early experiences as one of three surviving children of non-religious parents in Birmingham from the period of her enlightenment within the spiritual elite in Madeley. Tooth came into contact with the community in 1795 while working as a teacher, first in Mrs Micklewright’s school in Madeley and then at Miss Luton’s boarding school in Shiffnall (from where she travelled to Madeley to worship on the weekends). In October 1800 she relocated to live with Mary Fletcher and Sarah Lawrence permanently, speaking publicly in meetings and becoming a class leader in Madeley and neighbouring Coalport. In the Journal, Tooth suggests that her arrival in Madeley and her association with Mary Fletcher result in a rebirth that is comparable to Priscilla Hannah Gurney’s portrayal of her spiritual conversion as an alternative origin. However, Gurney figures herself as a ‘ruined building’ that is destroyed by a self-determined action and restored by the ‘master-builder’. In contrast, Tooth establishes Mary Fletcher as her spiritual mother, mentor, and author in an expression of earthly dependence.

Tooth records the anniversaries of her arrival in Madeley in her Journal, presenting it as the moment when she found a ‘people to whom I am joined hand and heart’.¹⁵¹ This image of collective sensibility and physical connection evokes Mary Fletcher’s conception of her faith as the rivers that ‘flow from heart to heart’.¹⁵² Tooth creates a spiritual topography of the landscapes of past and present, opposing her hometown of

¹⁴⁹ There are no Journal entries for the period 1807 to 1832 and 1833 to 1837.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Journal of Mary Tooth’, Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS B, p. 1. In MSS A-D Tooth uses page numbers and generally dates her entries, but for MSS E-N she orders her remarks by date only. For the purposes of consistency, references will be given by manuscript and date where possible and by manuscript and page number where no dates are available. In this section, references to ‘Journal of Mary Tooth’ will be provided in the footnotes (rather than in parentheses) in order to avoid disrupting the flow of the text with lengthy citations.

¹⁵¹ MS B, 26 September 1797.

¹⁵² ‘Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher’, Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS I, 35.

Birmingham and her workplace of Shiffnall to her 'spiritual birthplace' of Madeley.¹⁵³

On returning to Fletcher in 1797, she remarks:

I felt truly thankful to take my seat again under the mean roof of the vicarage Barn, it was to me more pleasant than the splendid Chapel at Birmingham, and well it might for it was my native air the soil on which my soul was born.¹⁵⁴

The Birmingham chapel is symbolic of her unenlightened early life and contrasted with the felt faith experienced in the vicarage barn. In a characteristic inversion, she identifies Madeley (rather than Birmingham) as her 'native air'. The image of the 'soil' recurs in Tooth's characterisation of Shiffnall as a 'dreary desert', 'a barren soil', and a 'barren land'.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, when Fletcher preaches in Madeley she notes that 'my soul felt her words distill as dew upon the mow'd grass'.¹⁵⁶

Tooth's metaphor reveals a distinctly different conception of ministry to the Quaker Mary Dudley, who suggests that 'thirsting for words' places the individual in a state of inauthentic dependence.¹⁵⁷ However, Tooth's opposing images of fertile landscapes and barren wastelands also evoke the spectre of true and false maternity that lies at the heart of her narrative. In a mirror image of Mary Fletcher's fantasy of maternal connection to Sarah Ryan, Tooth substitutes her 'spiritual mother' Mary Fletcher for her natural mother.¹⁵⁸ According to Tooth, her mother feels 'that right which God and nature had given her over me I had delegated to others'.¹⁵⁹ Tooth reinforces this sense of substitution in her remarks on the death of her mother in 1803, noting 'what cause have I to adore the loving kindness of the Lord who had given me a spiritual mother to be the guide of my youth before he removed this kind affectionate parent from earth'.¹⁶⁰

Tooth's maternal connection to Fletcher at times appears a passionate and sentimental attachment, comparable to Fletcher's ambiguous relationship with Sarah Ryan. The strength of Tooth's feelings is demonstrated in a Journal entry in which she poignantly describes her return to Shiffnall in 1800, noting 'this morning as I came

¹⁵³ MS C, 26 May 1798.

¹⁵⁴ MS B, January 1797.

¹⁵⁵ MS C, 13 May 1798; MS C, 13 November 1798; and MS F, 18 March 1800.

¹⁵⁶ MS B, 12 September 1796.

¹⁵⁷ Dudley, p. 99.

¹⁵⁸ MS B, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ MS C, 13 February 1798.

¹⁶⁰ MS B, p. 7.

from Madeley alone I was led to muse much on my great want of love'.¹⁶¹ Her frustration at the enforced separation is further expressed in the violent cross-hatchings that are scrawled across her words and bleed through the paper. Writing in retrospect of this intense relationship, Tooth recalls 'I was but once parted for a day and night from my beloved Mrs Fletcher for more than 15 years that I resided with her'.¹⁶² She notes with pride that Fletcher preserved the letter she sent during this brief separation. However, this earthly infatuation is also understood as a 'providential' friendship:

It was the cards of divine love that drew us to each other, she has told me that the first time she cast her eyes upon me something seemed to say in her 'I claim that soul for the Lord' the like to this she said she had twice in her life felt before and in both instances the young women proved eminently pious in life and happy in death.¹⁶³

In this ambiguous moment of love at first sight, Tooth imagines herself claimed for the Lord and invited into an exclusive genealogy of pious young women under Fletcher's mentorship. She seems to revel in her unique status, noting 'I am with them as none but myself are, as one of the family' and presents her 'place with his saint' as one of many 'precious privileges' for which she must compulsively express her gratitude.¹⁶⁴

However, Tooth's Journal also reveals feelings of anxiety and guilt at the 'privileged' nature of her position and her proximity to 'such eminent example piety'.¹⁶⁵ Her distress speaks to the larger question of whether a religious culture premised on self-comparisons and emulation might produce a damaging loss of self-worth in its followers. She confesses, 'when I consider the great advantages I have had in these respects, how is my soul humbled in the dust for having made no greater proficiencie in the divine life.'¹⁶⁶ The soul 'humbled in the dust' is reminiscent of the images of self-negation that pervade the Quaker spiritual autobiographies, such as Catharine Phillips's claim that the Lord 'humbled my spirit to the very dust' and Mary Dudley's confession that she conceives of herself as 'His unworthy dust'.¹⁶⁷ But in the case of

¹⁶¹ MS F, 16 April 1800.

¹⁶² MS B, p. 10.

¹⁶³ MS B, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁴ MS C, 23 September 1798; MS E, 27 December 1801; and MS G, 23 August 1800.

¹⁶⁵ MS G, 27 September 1800.

¹⁶⁶ MS B, 26 September 1796.

¹⁶⁷ Phillips, p. 176; and Dudley, p. 13.

Phillips and Dudley it is God that inspires feelings of humility and inadequacy rather than the presence of earthly idols. Tooth frequently engages in anxious self-comparisons, especially with ‘eminently pious’ young women. Sarah Lawrence’s self-condemnations and premature death incite feelings in Tooth of her own ‘vileness’ and result in her self-identification as ‘a useless worm’.¹⁶⁸ On one level, Tooth’s rejection of her earthly roots in favour of ideal spiritual models is a form of self-determination that is motivated by an ambitious desire for religious progress. However, in practice, her self-identification as the child of an elite spiritual genealogy results in a loss of personal history and produces feelings of doubt. Seemingly, her sense of self-worth rests exclusively on her connection to an eminent ‘other’.

‘All in her may be safely imitated’: Mary Fletcher and the exemplary life

Mary Fletcher’s life writing is shaped by her self-conception as a public and literary character and her role as the author of *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict of the Rev. John Fletcher* (1817). ‘Relict’ denotes both her status as a widow and her sense of herself as a precious remnant of a former era. She presents herself as Methodism’s representative subject and attaches a narrative of her personal experience to the history of the movement. This symbiotic relationship is comparable to Catharine Phillips’s synthesis of past and present. However, in contrast to Phillips’s expansion of female agency through a romantic return to a moment prior to her birth, Fletcher’s autobiography is a conservative revision of her own radical past. The published *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher* bears the traces of its nineteenth-century editor, but in the multiple drafts of her manuscript Fletcher demonstrates her own impulse for self-censorship. She highlights her activities as a philanthropist and spiritual counsellor over her ‘extraordinary’ and outmoded role as a woman preacher in order to establish herself as the ideal subject for posthumous emulation. Her autobiography is therefore steeped in nostalgia, as she imagines herself as the protector and inheritor of the legacy of John Fletcher. However, it is also anticipatory, as she attempts to influence the future through an edited version of the past.

Fletcher attaches her life story to the communal history of Methodism by imagining her spiritual conversion as part of a collective reformation. She presents the years

¹⁶⁸ MS F, 12 April 1800; and MS G, 4 May 1800.

1761 to 1762 (which coincided with her relocation to Hoxton) as a time when ‘rivers did indeed flow from heart to heart’ and suggests that ‘some drops of this river began to fall on me also’.¹⁶⁹ However, the composition history of the autobiography suggests that it is her marriage to John Fletcher that cements her identification with the religious community and allows her to see the workings of providence in her personal history. She completed the first three volumes of her autobiography after four years of marriage. However, her writing was interrupted by John Fletcher’s death in August 1785. This loss radically alters the form of her text, as the continuous narrative is replaced by disconnected extracts from her diary and an appendix detailing his illness. Fletcher’s writing therefore suggests that she is unable to incorporate his death into the story of her life.

John Fletcher provides her with a model of the Methodist ideal, evident in her comment of October 1782 that ‘the animating example of my dear husband stirs me up much’.¹⁷⁰ As his widow, she feels compelled to embody his example and transmit his legacy to others. She writes an ‘account of his precious death’ (IV, 11) in order to counter claims that he abandoned his Arminianism on his deathbed. The writing is presented as an act of ventriloquism, as she recalls that she cast herself ‘on the Lord to be guided by his hand as a machine’ (IV, 5). She imagines the text as an extension of her husband’s words, hoping that she has ‘helped in a little measure that shout of praise to go forth, which with his dyeing lips he said “he wanted to reach to the Ends of the Earth”’ (IV, 11). Fletcher prepares her husband’s works for publication (after receiving sanction to do so from John Fletcher himself in a dream) and contributes to John Wesley’s *A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Rev. John Fletcher* (1786). The *Life* presents John Fletcher as a spiritual ideal for emulation:

So unblameable a man in every respect, I have not found either in *Europe* or *America*. Nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity. Yet it is possible *we* may be such as he was. Let us then endeavour to follow him, as he followed Christ.¹⁷¹

In ‘rescuing’ John Fletcher’s Swiss nephew from deism, Mary Fletcher also establishes herself as a spiritual mentor made in her husband’s image. She records the

¹⁶⁹ ‘Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher’, Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS I, 35. In this section, further references to ‘Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher’ are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁷⁰ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 193.

¹⁷¹ John Wesley, *A Short Account of the Life and Death of the Rev. John Fletcher* (London: J. Paramore, 1786), pp. 225-26.

young man's transformation in her autobiography so that others engaged in a battle with philosophy and reason might replicate her pedagogical strategies.

Fletcher's most significant contribution to the preservation of John Fletcher's legacy was her determination to continue his spiritual mission in the parish of Madeley. Fletcher lived within the rented vicarage for the final thirty years of her life, preaching five times a week in the tithe barn that was home to Wesley's itinerant ministers. Janet Burge argues that a 'three-fold ministry' operated in Madeley, consisting of parish, Wesleyan preachers, and Mary Fletcher and her female *protégés*.¹⁷² In an account of the opening of the tithe barn in July 1788, Sarah Lawrence recalls that Rev. Melville Horne preached the sermon but 'before he [had] time to pray he was suddenly call[ed] out to a funeral which was waiting and left my dear mistress to dismiss the people'.¹⁷³ Fletcher played a crucial role in preventing schism between the Established Church and the Methodist Connexion in Madeley. As a Methodist preacher and the widow of the former Anglican vicar she embodied a moment of coexistence from a former era. In the year before her death, Fletcher records in her diary 'if my papers fall into any hands, I entreat these lines may never be left out. I have always considered myself as a member of the Church, and so have the united friends in Madeley'.¹⁷⁴ She laments that 'the church Minister has repeatedly expressed a wish that the Methodists should be a separate people' and makes a personal appeal to the curate Samuel Walters, which is reproduced in the footnotes of the *Life*:¹⁷⁵

When I close my eyes in Madeley, let me have the satisfaction to behold from the upper world, that the dove-like spirit which so eminently reigned in my dear husband has dropped, as his mantle, upon you, and that it shines forth as a double portion.¹⁷⁶

Fletcher casts her husband and Samuel Walters as the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha. She recalls the moment in the Book of Kings when Elijah 'went up by a whirlwind into heaven' and transferred his prophetic office to Elisha, who took up 'the mantle of Elijah that fell from him' and prayed that 'a double portion of thy spirit

¹⁷² Janet Burge, *Women Preachers in Community: Sarah Ryan, Sarah Crosby, Mary Bosanquet* (Peterborough: Foundry Press, 1996), p. 30.

¹⁷³ Sarah Lawrence, 'Account of the Opening of a Barn in Madeley Village', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 16, MS I, 1.

¹⁷⁴ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 272-73.

¹⁷⁵ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 273-74.

¹⁷⁶ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 278.

be upon me'.¹⁷⁷ Seemingly, this institutional decision threatens Fletcher's sense of connection to the 'family' in heaven and earth and places her spiritual identity under strain.

Writing was central to Fletcher's project to propagate and preserve the original values of Methodism. Throughout her life she was a prolific writer of sermons, correspondence, biographies, and a private diary. On her death, she instructed Mary Tooth to pass the manuscript of her spiritual autobiography to John Wesley's biographer Henry Moore for publication. Moore spliced together Fletcher's original narrative with entries from her spiritual diary and the work was published as *The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict of the Rev. John Fletcher* in 1817, going through twenty editions in the first fifty years.¹⁷⁸ In the *Life*, Moore presents Fletcher as an embodiment of 'that great revival of Scriptural Christianity in our day' whose life might 'be safely imitated'.¹⁷⁹ He seeks to defend Fletcher (and Methodism) from association with religious enthusiasm, removing physical manifestations of spirituality from the sanitised public version. For instance, Fletcher's description of the night when she could only climb the stairs two-handed and 'could not recollect where to find my nightcap' (I, 22) is discretely edited out. Moore moderates Fletcher's emotional vocabulary, diluting the 'passion' (III, 19) she feels as a result of financial distress into 'sentiment' in the published work. He also provides elaborate footnotes to explain any references to dreams or visions.¹⁸⁰ Predictably, the extraordinary passage in which Fletcher describes her impulse to self-harm is excluded, as Moore disassociates the screaming, bleeding figure of the young Mary Fletcher from the matronly *Mrs. Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict*.

Moore's editorial interventions are consistent with his desire to compress the manuscript into conformity with the conservative image of nineteenth-century Methodism.¹⁸¹ Fletcher defines 'legitimate' religious practice in more flexible terms than her descendent, but she shares Moore's concern over the charge of enthusiasm.

¹⁷⁷ II Kings 2. 9-14.

¹⁷⁸ Kent Brown, p. 109.

¹⁷⁹ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, vi and xxii.

¹⁸⁰ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 112 and 188.

¹⁸¹ For a further example of the influence of a nineteenth-century editor on an eighteenth-century spiritual autobiography, see Isabel Rivers, 'Joseph Williams of Kidderminster (1692-1755) and his Journal', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 7 (2005), 359-80.

The rough drafts of her manuscript demonstrate her propensity for self-censorship in their assiduous corrections, revisions, and insertions. For instance, in the first draft Fletcher recalls that at Leytonstone a young man enters the society who ‘appeared as one possessed of the Devil’ and ‘run about the farm night and day bidding the people believe preaching Christ in the most rambling manner’ and ‘turning his body into all manner of forms’ (II, 9). However, Fletcher expels this figure in the second draft in order to render her life suitable for entry into print.¹⁸² Her revisions may be explained by Jon Mee’s argument that the socially disruptive mania of enthusiasm ‘looked like the grotesque other of the polite public sphere to many eighteenth-century observers’.¹⁸³

Moore memorialises Mary Fletcher as the philanthropist, minister’s wife, and spiritual counsellor and reconfigures her preaching as an extension of her domestic role. In his epilogue, he claims that ‘her preaching was but an enlargement of her daily and hourly conversation. Her family - her visitors, might be said to be her constant congregation’.¹⁸⁴ However, Mary Fletcher takes Moore’s impulse to domesticate the problematic figure of the woman preacher one step further, exiling this aspect of her experience from her manuscript and consigning it to her correspondence and private diary. This resistance may have been a response to the spiritual and literary zeitgeist dominant within Methodism by the 1780s. However, Fletcher’s fear that her public preaching compromises her feminine propriety is expressed in her correspondence and diary entries of the 1760s and 1770s, suggesting that she had always struggled to come to terms with her ‘extraordinary calling’. In her diary, she reflects that when she is engaged in visits to the poor or the sick ‘I seemed to be in my own element. But when in a more public way, I do not seem as much in my place’.¹⁸⁵ In her descriptions of her meetings in Yorkshire during the 1770s, she repeatedly imagines herself from the perspective of her audience. On one occasion she confesses ‘it appeared to me, I should seem in their eyes as a bad woman, or a stage player’.¹⁸⁶ Fletcher suggests that a public role potentially compromises sexual morality, as she aligns the woman preacher with ‘dubious’ models of female performance. After preaching to a crowd in

¹⁸² Fletcher strikes a line through the incident in the original copy and removes it in her second draft.

¹⁸³ Mee, p. 73.

¹⁸⁴ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, II, 297.

¹⁸⁵ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 124.

¹⁸⁶ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 128.

September 1776, she comments 'I know the power of God which I felt when standing on the horse-block in the street at Huddersfield; but, at the same time, I am conscious how ridiculous I must appear in the eyes of many for so doing'.¹⁸⁷ In a self-portrait that evokes the model of the Quaker prophet rather than the ideals of the Wesleyan Conference, Fletcher reveals the disjunction between her public-image in the 'eyes of many' and her character in the sight of God.

Fletcher's identity as a woman preacher threatens her self-representation as Methodism's ideal subject at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, Fletcher suggests that, while she may be buffeted by developments within Methodism, her personal history and spiritual progress are inextricable from the evolution of the movement. In a striking image of this symbiotic relationship, she claims that even though the Methodists 'were to toss me about as a foot-ball, I would stick to them like a leech'.¹⁸⁸ Fletcher incorporates herself into the body of the society and seeks to extract and transmit its values. However, her self-identification as a parasite suggests that while she gains a sense of orientation through this connection it is potentially at the cost of her personal autonomy.

'They live yea they live forever and their works do follow them': Mary Tooth and inherited selfhood

Mary Tooth is the ideal reader of Mary Fletcher's posthumously published exemplary life. In the years after Fletcher's death, she perpetuates her legacy, acts as a spiritual mentor to the people of Madeley, and provides a precious connection to a former era. Tooth shares Fletcher's impulse to preserve the values of Methodism in her life writing, excluding personal details and self-reflection in favour of anecdotes and transcripts of the writing and preaching of others. Historians of Methodism have replicated Mary Tooth's original self-effacement and she appears only as the briefest of adjuncts in discussions of the life of Mary Fletcher or as a footnote in the history of Madeley.¹⁸⁹ Tooth's consignment to the archive may be a consequence of her

¹⁸⁷ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 157.

¹⁸⁸ *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, I, 158.

¹⁸⁹ Recent discussions of women Methodists by Paul Chilcote, Earl Kent Brown, Janet Burge, and Maldwyn Edwards do not include an account of Mary Tooth's life. Zachariah Taft limits his account to three pages, noting Tooth's 'successful labours in the same glorious cause, in which her spiritual mother had been so long, and so successfully employed'. Taft, II, 230.

determination to assimilate herself within a communal history rather than articulate an individuated life. Like the Quaker preachers, Tooth becomes a 'vessel'. But instead of understanding herself as an instrument for the word of God, she imagines herself as a channel for a collective past. For in this autobiography of an amanuensis intertextuality becomes a form of self-imposed silence.

Tooth suggests that she has no wish for a personal textual legacy and presents her Journal as a strictly private document from the outset. She claims that 'with regard to my writing any thing respecting myself for publication I have never been willing to spend my time in that way'.¹⁹⁰ Tooth reinforces her position elsewhere in the Journal, aspiring to be of 'no reputation' and commenting 'I am anxious for no record of my name but in the Lambs Book of life'.¹⁹¹ She constructs herself as a practical embodiment of the lives of others and records her responses to spiritual autobiographies that inspire her to self-scrutiny and reform.¹⁹² After reading the life of Lady Guion, she notes that 'such lives do me good to consider they give me to see my own defects, and send me to my closet to wrestle for a deeper work of grace in my soul'.¹⁹³

Tooth suggests that in Madeley she contemplates the exemplary life at first-hand, remarking that in Mary Fletcher and Sarah Lawrence she 'saw living Epistles of Christ'.¹⁹⁴ She privileges personal contact over textual mediation in her claim that 'their lives spoke more than volumes could'.¹⁹⁵ However, in the conflation of visual, vocal, and verbal imagery, Tooth suggests that she relates to Fletcher and Lawrence simultaneously as personal friends, public preachers, and literary figures. In a Journal entry of 1800, Tooth recalls of Mary Fletcher:

¹⁹⁰ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS B, p. 4. In this section, further references to 'Journal of Mary Tooth' are given in the footnotes by manuscript and date where possible and by manuscript and page number where no dates are available.

¹⁹¹ MS E, 23 June 1801; and MS M, 31 January 1839.

¹⁹² Rivers, 'Dissenting and Methodist Books', p. 159.

¹⁹³ MS C, 6 August 1798.

¹⁹⁴ MS B, p. 36.

¹⁹⁵ MS B, p. 37.

At night she read me the remainder of Mrs Ryan's letters, this was truly a time of refreshing to me, my soul drunk in each word; I felt a little of her spirit when she said his name is as ointment poured forth, I feel it in my very lips; this night I found my spirit united to these dear servants of God more than I ever did before how delightful is the company of the excellent upon earth!¹⁹⁶

Tooth experiences a moment of fusion with the spirit of Ryan (manifested as a physical connection in her 'very lips') and ventriloquises the words of a preacher who died a decade before her birth. Tooth therefore establishes her place within a spiritual genealogy and reinforces her connection to eminent Methodists as a reader of their lives. However, as a consequence, her preaching becomes pre-scripted. She comments in 1832:

This evening when reading to the people that fragment of Mr Fletcher's [...] I felt much of the spirit of the writer in his words and was let to enlarge with freedom of spirit upon them it appeared by the silence of the people as if they felt the same. It being possible that the fragment will be lost I will copy it.¹⁹⁷

Tooth forges a bond between herself, the dead author of the fragment (who died before her third birthday), and the present community of the silent people. In contrast to Mary Dudley's self-conception as a passive vessel and Catharine Phillips's image of the inspired prophet, Tooth articulates an inherited insight and channels the earthly voices of the past at the expense of her own.

Tooth's tendency to orientate herself towards the past is compounded by the death of her beloved Mary Fletcher in 1815, from which time she presents herself as the protector and embodiment of Fletcher's spiritual legacy. In 'Letter to the Inhabitants of Madeley on the Death of Mary Fletcher', Tooth recalls her response to the loss of her spiritual mentor, confessing 'I clung to the casket of the saint, knelt down by the side of it, and cried to him who had just now called home the spirit of my friend, that the mantle might rest on me'.¹⁹⁸ In her image of the mantle she evokes the figures of the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha, simultaneously affirming her intimate relationship to Mary Fletcher and her sense of responsibility for the people of Madeley. Tooth enthusiastically takes up the 'mantle', acting as a spiritual mentor to the children and grandchildren of those who first found God through the class leadership of Mary Fletcher. She imagines family reunions in the afterlife made

¹⁹⁶ MS F, 5 April 1800.

¹⁹⁷ MS I, 6 January 1832.

¹⁹⁸ Taft, I, 35.

possible through this joint, cross-generational ministry. In a revealing reversal of convention, Tooth expresses her hopes that she and the Methodists of Madeley will be 'closer followers of the Lamb then we shall more nearly resemble those ever revered characters Mr & Mrs Fletcher'.¹⁹⁹ For in this instance, emulating Christ becomes a path to resembling the Fletchers. Tooth locates herself within a continuous history through material objects. She transfers the 'communion table cloth' from the old church at Madeley and the 'clock' from the vicarage barn to her own 'upper room' reserved for public meetings.²⁰⁰ She compares her home to the 'Eden' Fletcher discovered with Ryan and presents it as 'a Bethel to so many precious souls', echoing Fletcher's characterisation of Hoxton Square over seventy years previously.²⁰¹

Madeley is a site of pilgrimage and a shrine to 'the worthies that have lived in these parts'.²⁰² Tooth is the custodian who dispenses and displays relics, such as Mary Fletcher's handkerchief and 'the Bible in which Mr Fletcher recorded the event of his marriage'.²⁰³ She presents this role as an extension of her ministry, desiring that the 'spirit' of the Fletchers will be reanimated and 'shed abroad in the hearts of those that visit' such that 'they live yea they live forever and their works do follow them'.²⁰⁴ In the final volume of her Journal, Tooth reveals that she is the inheritor of the Fletcher 'seal'. She notes that when a group of Methodist preachers visit Madeley in 1839 'each of them had an impression from it'.²⁰⁵ The seal is a fitting symbol for Tooth's personal and spiritual identity, since she remakes herself in the Fletchers' image. The dual process of impression and inscription creates a self-certainty that is absent in her Quaker counterparts, who struggle to imagine an answering face in the glass. However, while Fletcher and Tooth's images of the mantle, the leech, and the seal express their sense of belonging, these metaphors also reveal the potential for distortion and disfigurement. In the next section of this study, the ambivalent effects of religious affiliation that can be traced within the life writing of Fletcher and Tooth find a more radical expression in the life of sectarian Methodist Ann Freeman.

¹⁹⁹ MS M, 27 January 1840.

²⁰⁰ MS N, 6 October 1841.

²⁰¹ MS M, 17 March 1840; and MS N, 10 June 1842.

²⁰² MS M, 1 April 1839.

²⁰³ MS N, 6 October 1841.

²⁰⁴ MS M, 2 June 1838; and MS M, 1 April 1839.

²⁰⁵ MS N, 6 October 1841.

Ann Freeman (1797-1826): 'To Join the Iron and Clay'

In her autobiography, Ann Freeman rejects the model of communal spirituality presented by Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth and adopts a radical stance that takes Methodism's valorisation of the individual conscience to its logical end. She articulates her lifelong struggle 'to join the iron and clay, *i.e.* the truth in the heart, and the forms of man without', as she aspires to a relationship between self and community in which collective forms shape themselves to the needs of the individual believer.²⁰⁶ However, as a figure at the centre of religious controversy (excluded from the community of the Wesleyan Methodists in 1817 and the Bible Christians in 1824) Freeman's life is a testimony to the complexity of reconciling self-determination and spiritual belonging. Her strident and individuated self-image in the *Memoir* is closer to Catharine Phillips's confident public identity than the relational selves of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth. However, while Phillips fashions an enabling self-image from within the traditions of Quakerism, Freeman constructs herself in opposition to institutional religion and styles herself as a preacher in exile. This position enables Freeman to articulate a proto-feminist agenda, defending the rights of women preachers against the laws of man. However, rather than suggesting that individualism represents an ideal mode of female selfhood and feminist resistance, the *Memoir* is a lament for a lost fellowship that reveals the pain of a life out of 'connexion'. Freeman insists on her personal and spiritual independence, but her utopia is a spiritual community that will posthumously reclaim her from the isolation of her present.

Freeman's narrative is structured around moments of conflict that express the difficulty of reconciling spiritual autonomy with family commitments and religious fellowship. Her early experiences present parallels to the personal and social dislocation of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth, since conversion to Methodism results in Freeman and her sister being temporarily 'banished' from their Anglican family home (p. 4). She echoes Fletcher in her claim 'we knew, if we loved father or mother, brothers or sisters, more than Christ, we were not worthy of him' (p. 4) and demonstrates the full implications of this phrase in her rejection of patriarchal authority. However, instead of leaving home like Fletcher, she remakes her family in

²⁰⁶ Ann Freeman, *A Memoir of the Life and Ministry of Ann Freeman* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1826), p. 45. In this section, further references to the *Memoir* are given after quotations in the text.

her own image by converting her mother, sister, and four brothers to Methodism within eighteenth months of her return to her father's house. She expresses this assimilation in an acrostic, interweaving a call to God with the family name of 'Mason':

May you with Mary, choose the better part,
And never from the Saviour's feet depart.
Soon may He fill your soul with peace and pow'r;
Only believe, you'll feel the gracious show'r.
Nothing more there is to do: Ask, and it is given you. (p. 132)

Freeman's refusal to compromise her spiritual independence means that this original pattern of conflict, separation, and alternative unions is repeated throughout the *Memoir*. She recounts that in 1817 she abandoned her apprenticeship as a dressmaker and broke with the Wesleyan Methodists in order to become an itinerant preacher with the sectarian Methodist group of the Bible Christians.²⁰⁷ Freeman therefore rejects a relational identity based on identification and emulation (characteristic of both the mentoring of apprenticeship and the spiritual modelling of Wesleyan Methodism).

In contrast to Mary Tooth's impulse to emulate earthly models and transcribe the words of others into her Journal, Freeman resists prescriptive patterns and identifies directly with God. She comments in her verse, 'I want to live, that all around may see/ In me a transcript of the Deity' (p. 46). Freeman's faith in personal insight and divine direction allows her to deny the restrictions of sex and class, as she imagines herself 'more independent than the king upon the throne' (p. 42). This linguistic conflation of spiritual and political power is reminiscent of the women of early Quakerism. Freeman revels in her oppositional stance, declaring that she 'must obey God rather than man' (p. 8) and 'subscribe to no man's creed' (p. 208). She presents herself as a threat to religious authority and legal institutions, recalling with pride that 'the parsons and parish-officers have searched for me, as though I was come to destroy the land' (p. 12). Male authority figures are repeatedly undermined, as she imagines them as 'poor short-sighted men' (p. 21) to be 'pitied' (p. 89) rather than spiritual mentors to be imitated. She criticises a Bishops-gate parson, with whom she prays at a woman's deathbed, and corrects an Irish preacher, who 'attempted to instruct me how

²⁰⁷ Valenze, p. 144.

to act' (p. 88). Like Phillips, she is able to engage in cross-gendered identifications with the 'king upon the throne' and yet also defend herself from attack on the basis of her sex, asserting the rights and abilities of women against the prejudices of men.

Freeman's commitment to women's right to preach was at the heart of her antagonistic relationship with religious institutions, particularly the Wesleyan Conference. In her *Memoir*, she describes it as her 'duty' (p. 63) to protect women's religious freedom from the encroachment of masculine authority. After preaching in a Methodist chapel in 1818, she recalls:

I visited a young woman who I believe was called to preach; but being opposed by man she omitted her duty, and the distress of her mind had almost destroyed her body. It appears, an old preacher was the chief instrument of her misery: she seemed to feel some relief in telling her sad tale to me. Many females are kept in bondage by those who say, 'we suffer not a woman to teach;' thus quoting Paul's words, and not rightly applying them. Man's opinion on this subject is nothing with me; for it is woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel. (p. 14)

She provides numerous illustrations of women 'destroyed' by the denials of their call to preach. She also implies that the ban represents a betrayal of Methodism's founding principles, calling as her witness an eighty-three year old Wesleyan who is a staunch advocate of women preachers. However, while she sympathises and records the 'sad tale', she ultimately constructs herself in opposition to these submissive figures of femininity and celebrates her independence from masculine sanction as an 'extraordinary' figure outside the law. Fletcher consigns her radical role as a preacher to her private diary, whereas, Freeman prides herself on her refusal to shape her spiritual identity to the collective self-image of her community.

Freeman found support for her personalised faith and spontaneous preaching within the Bible Christians. However, she sustained her commitment to objective critique and self-assertion, even within this comparatively progressive atmosphere. In her *Memoir*, she recalls her attempt to correct William O'Bryan (leader of the Bible Christians) on the doctrine of perfectionism. In terms reminiscent of Sarah Ryan's egalitarian relationship with John Wesley, she concludes 'I told him, I knew his soul was not thus saved, and begged he would expect it' (p. 25). Like the early Quakers, Freeman identifies herself with Old Testament prophets in her poem of 1823, 'Written to a Young Woman in Despondency of Mind':

O, may I write, as Moses did of old,
 And the same spirit now the truth unfold,
 That did inspire the first pen-man to write,
 And mysteries were thereby brought to light. (p. 150)

Freeman draws on Moses as a figure related to the centre and yet 'imaginatively linked to the world of the other', whose story is 'littered with resourceful female figures'.²⁰⁸ However, unlike the Quaker impulse to lose identity in identification, Freeman wishes to write like 'Moses did of old' (animated by the 'same spirit' as a fellow prophet but distinct from this spiritual predecessor). In these assertions of her divinely inspired ministry and her confident critique of the male leadership of her society, Freeman attains Phillips's ideal of speaking as a prophet in her own voice. But Freeman goes one step beyond Phillips, who claims she 'dropped' her 'pen in regard to verses', and reconciles a creative act with obedience to the word of God.²⁰⁹

Freeman's fervent commitment to spiritual autonomy and resistance to formal worship is a toxic combination that undermines her ability to practice her faith within the structures of organised religion. She rejects Wesley's desire for 'the common faith and common salvation' and Mary Tooth's emulation of religious mentors.²¹⁰ Instead, she counsels her sister to 'never look to any man or woman, as a direct pattern or example' (p. 168). Freeman understands her spiritual development as a progressive abandonment of forms, evident in her claim that 'the most critical part of the great salvation' is deliverance 'from every thing that is formal' (p. 98). Her ideal is a peace that 'flows as a river, yea, even overflows its banks' (p. 15). She therefore presents her spiritual progression as an expansion without limit or constraint, in contrast to Mary Fletcher's incorporation within the rivers that 'flow from heart to heart'.

Freeman criticises the 'formality' (p. 39) of the Bible Christians, demanding 'more simplicity' and arguing against 'too much preaching' (p. 35). Her husband claims (in terms reminiscent of Quakerism) that Freeman believed 'no one can know the Scriptures, but by the Spirit' (p. 243). This paradox of a desire for an abandonment of form within a religious community reaches a crisis in 1824, when Freeman notes that

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Jay, "'When Egypt's Slain, I Say, Let Miriam Sing!': Women, Dissent and Marginality", in *Dissent and Marginality: Essays on the Borders of Literature and Religion*, ed. by Kiyoshi Tsuchiya (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. 80-101 (pp. 83-84).

²⁰⁹ Phillips, p. 18.

²¹⁰ *Letters of John Wesley*, VII, 67.

she can no longer reconcile 'conscience' and 'customs' (p. 191) and separates from the Bible Christians.²¹¹ Freeman's position out of 'connexion' is central to her sense of spiritual integrity, as it allows her to imagine herself as a martyr 'honoured to suffer' (p. 71) and 'hated for His sake' (p. 220). This oppositional identity is reinforced by accusations of 'selfishness, independency, &c.' (p. 73) from her community and public hostility to her preaching, as she comments that 'when the stones, &c. were thrown at me, I received them as precious gifts from kind friends' (p. 87).

Freeman claims that she has 'no greater ambition than to die a martyr's death' (p. 11). However, her *Memoir* is an attempt to write herself back into a community of a 'little, despised band' (p. 98) and a 'glorious army of martyrs' (p. 65), reminiscent of Catharine Phillips's image of the Quakers as 'a chosen people of God, abiding in our tents'.²¹² In a radical inversion of the joint ministry of Mary and John Fletcher, Freeman suggests that her break with the religious community is enabled by her marriage to Henry Freeman in 1824. She recalls, 'I felt I needed a companion, that was, in every sense, like minded, and that would come forth boldly with me, in protesting against the vain traditions of men, &c' (p. 191). However, Freeman's apparent rejection of religious affiliation is accompanied by a desire for a universal spiritual connection, unmediated by formalism, patterns, or collective practices. She notes in a letter of 17 April 1824:

I never loved my fellow-creatures more, and never feared them less. I am as perfectly free from a party spirit, as though there was but one community; and neither directly, nor indirectly, respect persons. And oh, what have I of late felt for the state of the world, especially for professors. (p. 179)

Even as Freeman articulates the pain of separation she establishes a universal bond with the members of her community, remarking that 'I still shall claim them as my people, so far as they are the Lord's; for His people are mine. My soul flamed with love to them, while tears ran copiously from mine eyes' (p. 68). In her biblical identifications, Freeman is attracted to the isolated founders of communities. She aligns herself with 'the first pen-man' Moses (p. 150) and suggests that her marriage is 'out of the will of God, as Eve was when given to Adam' (p. 182). Deborah

²¹¹ Valenze, pp. 150-51.

²¹² Phillips, p. 266.

Valenze notes that the Freemans' were committed to 'extemporaneous, informal evangelizing' rather than formation of their own sect.²¹³ However, in their association with Adam and Eve, the couple implicitly identify themselves as the parents of a new society. Through these alignments, Freeman narrates her present segregation as part of a providential pattern and imagines herself posthumously integrated within a spiritual fellowship. As such, the *Memoir* is both a self-vindication that accounts for her position out of 'connexion' and a textual fantasy of a utopian community that might be realised after her death. Freeman asserts that the assurance of God is sufficient, 'even if no man should ever know that I am right' (p. 206). But she also imagines a redemptive future in which her words will be understood and 'all will see it, if not in our time' (p. 220).

Freeman's life highlights the struggle for Quaker and Methodist women writers of mediating a personal relationship to God through membership of a religious community. The *Memoir* is a forceful expression of independence that challenges the 'false' formalist faith of her present moment. However, this radically oppositional stance is tempered by Freeman's lament for the absence of a 'true' spiritual fellowship and her expressions of hope for a community which can only be imagined. Charles Taylor argues that separating the self from a present community in favour of identification with a future social ideal is still an expression of interdependence:

We may sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethrone the given, historic community as a pole of identity, and relate only to the community defined by adherence to the good (of the saved, or the true believers, or the wise). But this doesn't sever our dependence on webs of interlocution. It only changes the webs, and the nature of our dependence.²¹⁴

Revealingly, in a diary entry from around the time of her separation from the Bible Christians, Freeman confesses that 'as face answereth to face, so doth the witness in me, with the testimony of G. Fox' (p. 61). Freeman's evocation of the words of the founding father of Quakerism is consistent with her ideal spiritual community, which seems closer to the sympathetic connection of the Quakers than the coercive regulation of nineteenth-century Methodism. However, in her willingness to embrace

²¹³ Valenze, p. 158.

²¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 39.

a universal fellowship, Freeman revives the spirit of early Methodism that transmitted from heart to heart rather than the insularity of eighteenth-century Quakerism.

These women writers suggest that at its best religious affiliation provides a coherent sense of personal identity and social belonging, enables self-reinvention, and enhances women's capacity for public action and critical self-consciousness. However, at the same time, these writers struggle to reconcile personal desire and spiritual dependence, self-expression and religious conformity, and an individuated relationship to God with membership of a spiritual community. Bruce Hindmarsh's conclusion that 'the community of faith' provides an empowering alternative to 'the pathological autonomy of the secular individualist self' seems premised on the notion that religious community is inherently positive.²¹⁵ However, in these Quaker and Methodist narratives, individualism and solidarity are complex and problematic alternatives. For Quaker Catharine Phillips and Methodist Ann Freeman, religious identification enables them to reject a restrictive feminine ideal and authorises their social and political participation. Both women imagine a public female character grounded in feminine authority, yet, at the same time, engage in liberating cross-gendered identifications. In contrast, Mary Dudley's self-dispersal within the transcendent community of the Quakers undermines her critical self-consciousness, alienates her within her own body, and results in a damaging spiritual retrenchment. Wesleyan Methodists Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth impress themselves on the world through preaching, philanthropy, and charitable reform, as their faith enhances their capacity for public action. However, in their life writing they seem silenced by their position and locked within networks of dependence, as they perpetuate a script that is not of their own making. Fletcher and Tooth's autobiographical practices therefore foreground the potential costs of embedding the self in a religious fellowship. However, Priscilla Hannah Gurney's *Memoir* suggests that adopting the role of the self-made heroine may detach an individual from her past and encourage self-destructive fantasies. Ann Freeman's utopia may allow a way out of the hiatus between isolated individualism and collective incorporation, as she imagines a productive marriage between Quakerism's commitment to self-analysis and spiritual autonomy and Methodism's valorisation of kinship and social activism. While

²¹⁵ Hindmarsh, pp. 348-49.

Methodist Sarah Ryan, whose narrative we will turn to in the postscript to this chapter, reveals the potential for women to combine self-determination with membership of a spiritual fellowship.

The religious and social radicalism of these narratives frequently coexists with sexual conservatism. Nevertheless, in their attempts to articulate their personal histories within a collective movement based on shared ideals, the voices of these writers speak to present feminist concerns. Catharine Phillips and Ann Freeman demonstrate the liberating potential of a public authority and personal identity grounded simultaneously in equality and difference. Mary Dudley and Mary Fletcher invite us to question the role of altruism and social networks in women's lives and consider the implications of an ethical re-evaluation of relationalism. In addition, Mary Tooth and Priscilla Hannah Gurney's engagements with a spiritual legacy suggests that contemporary feminism must balance nostalgia for an inspirational past with an urgent need to address the present. These spiritual voices therefore reveal the challenge of connecting identity to something larger than the self, as they attempt to balance independent thought and self-knowledge with community membership and social engagement.

Sarah Ryan (1724-1768): 'With Magdalene at the Masters Feet'

The remarkable personal history of Methodist Sarah Ryan, that was dictated to Mary Fletcher and recorded in the manuscript 'Mrs Ryan Life' around 1767, falls between exemplary life and scandalous memoir. It therefore combines the autobiographical practices of the spiritual women addressed in chapter one and the courtesans discussed in chapter two. As a consequence of its ambiguous status as a narrative of religious and sexual conversion, orality and textuality, and fictional figures and spiritual tropes, it has been relegated to the archive. But it is crucial to this study as a work that reveals what is at stake in self-identification as a religious subject or a sentimental heroine. 'Mrs Ryan Life' describes Ryan's 'marriages' to three husbands (two simultaneously), her experiences in domestic service, and her Methodist conversion. The neglect of the work suggests that the tradition of the spiritual autobiography is premised on the recognition of certain models of female experience

at the expense of the voice of the labouring or desiring woman. However, its generic instability is also a source of freedom. Ryan transforms spiritual and sentimental conventions into a mode of self-articulation, even if the realities of her experience cannot be fully expressed within these literary paradigms. In her sense of herself as a unique subject and the heroine of her own romance, she seems a strikingly modern figure. However, describing her early life in romantic terms seems to inhibit her ability to understand her personal tragedy as part of a collective experience of sexual exploitation. In contrast, in the transition from romance to religion she is able to attach herself to a narrative of collective reformation. But she depoliticises her experience in her tendency to envisage marital abuse as a divine punishment for past sins. However, it is in the fusion of her identities as a spiritual self and a sexual character that she retains a sense of her unique value and establishes her place within a female community.

Ryan articulates her life through literary conventions but, in doing so, she reveals the inability of the sentimental and romantic form to explain or express her personal experience. The text's capacity to destabilise the boundaries between legal marriage, cohabitation, and prostitution puts pressure on the ideals of romance and morality to which Ryan apparently subscribes. Her first husband is a bigamist who encourages her to have sex with his friends for money. For as she remarks 'if I could make him a few guineas now and then he should like me never the worse for it'.²¹⁶ Ryan recalls the events that led to her marriage to both Solomon Benreken, an Italian 'East Indies man' (p. 14), and Mr Ryan, an Irish merchant. In her narrative of her marriages, she aligns herself with Samuel Richardson's heroine Clarissa at the moment of her sexual 'fall'. After hearing a report that Mr Ryan is dying she agrees to spend the night at his bedside in a boarding house, although (like her fictional counterpart) Ryan notes she did not 'suspect what sort of house it was' (p. 16):

In the night he seemed very bad and I felt great tenderness for him but alas this night proved the womb of sorrowful years to come – he was bent on my ruin and affection joined with force made me that night wholly his own. (p. 16)

Ryan seeks moral protection and reader sympathy as the ruined victim Clarissa. Yet she also retains the possibility that she is a desiring subject, drawing on Richardson's

²¹⁶ 'Mrs Ryan's Life', Fletcher-Tooth, 24, MS I, 12. In this section, further references to 'Mrs Ryan's Life' are given after quotations in the text.

ambiguous depiction of the heroine's rape in her suggestion that ruination is a combination of 'affection' and 'force'. However, this fictional identification is undermined by the realities of Ryan's experience. Unlike Clarissa's martyrdom and angelic death, Ryan's 'ruination' locks her into a desperate marriage that is characterised by physical violence, verbal abuse, a punishing schedule of labour, and sexually transmitted disease. There is no language in which to express the horrifying realities that continue beyond the climax of the sentimental fiction. Instead, her text falls back on a moral discourse of sin or retreats into silence, as she poignantly remarks that Mr Ryan 'used me in a manner my sins deserved, but tongue cannot explain' (p. 17).

Ryan's identification with fictional tropes allows her to imagine a sympathetic connection with her audience. However, throughout her narrative she seems a highly independent figure. This singularity is evident in Ryan's experience at an infirmary, where she is sent in order to cure a sexual infection 'occasioned by my Husband's last return' (p. 24):

I was in the ward with the bad Women and found great pitty in their souls – when I was able to rise from my bed I used to go to them one by one render them what assistance I could and with tears intreat them to think of the[ir] precious souls – at first they did everything they could to tease and persecute me but after a little time they seemed to love me much - would hear me with great attention and in return would lament their way of life and tell me the storys of their ruin. There were a great many in at that time and I don't remember one that was more than 20 most had been drawn away by some gentleman at 14 or 15 and then left to the town. I felt great pitty towards them wondering at the goodness of God to me, that I was not in the same situation after all that I had done. (pp. 24-25)

Ryan adopts the stance of the reformist preacher, entreating the women to think of their 'precious souls' and collecting the 'storys of their ruin', as she superimposes her present identity as a minister onto this traumatic moment from her past. She separates herself from this sentimentalised circle of female storytellers, even as she dictates her history to Mary Fletcher, wondering 'that I was not in the same situation after all that I had done'. Ryan therefore resists assimilation within this society of female victims in favour of entry into a literary and spiritual community, imagining herself as the martyred Clarissa and the Methodist preacher rather than the fellow penitent.

Methodism enables Ryan's liberation from cycles of abuse and establishes her within a female fellowship. She presents spiritual conversion as an emancipation from her debilitating desire for her husband, noting in an autobiographical extract that after she refuses an invitation to join Mr Ryan in America 'no sooner had I sent away the letter but my soul was set at liberty, my idolatrous affections were under my feet and my heart fixed on God'.²¹⁷ This vocabulary of freedom is accompanied by portrayals of God as a source of refuge and protection. He provides 'walled gardens' and a 'castle' that present an alternative to the domestic imprisonment she experiences with Mr Ryan.²¹⁸ She describes her original courtship as a moment when 'Satan entered into me' (p. 15). However, this eroticised imagery also emerges in her characterisation of her relationship to God, as she feels her soul 'all on fire' and reveals 'I find the name of Jesus written on my heart with the finger of God: it is as ointment poured forth. I turn to taste it on my very lips'.²¹⁹ Therefore, the quest for romantic fulfilment through marriage transforms into a pilgrimage of spiritual belonging and union with God.

Ryan resists identification as the penitent prostitute while surrounded by the 'bad Women' in the hospital. However, within the Methodist fellowship she embraces the persona, allegedly commenting to her audiences 'I have need to be with Magdalene at the Masters feet'.²²⁰ However, while spirituality seems a liberating alternative to romantic oppression, religious paradigms also appear to reinforce Ryan's impulse for self-abasement. Autobiography is central to Ryan's practice as a preacher, as 'she found [a] kind of holy delight' in the testimony of past sins.²²¹ But, rather than a positive affirmation, testimony is represented as a form of self-division. Fletcher suggests that Ryan described it as 'taking part' 'with his holiness against herself!' and presents her 'rejoicing to be abased that God might be exalted'.²²² In extracts from her diary, Ryan reveals her desire to establish herself as a living tableau of sin. She remarks 'I am willing to have all my wretchedness wrote on my forehead if that can be for thine Honour'.²²³ This tendency to interpret her experience through a

²¹⁷ Sarah Ryan, 'Autobiographical Account', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS III, 10.

²¹⁸ Sarah Ryan, 'Diary Extracts', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 55.

²¹⁹ Sarah Ryan, 'Correspondence', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 110.

²²⁰ Mary Fletcher, 'Some Further Account of Mrs Ryan', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 35.

²²¹ Mary Fletcher, 'Some Further Account of Mrs Ryan', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 35.

²²² Mary Fletcher, 'Some Further Account of Mrs Ryan', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 35.

²²³ Sarah Ryan, 'Diary Extracts', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 47.

framework of sin is a problematic aspect of her spiritual 'liberation'. Conversion reinforces her sense of herself as a worthy victim, evident in her comment that in response to Mr Ryan's violence 'I read my sin in every punishment and adored God for his justice as well as his mercy, quietly taking the most barbarous treatment' (p. 26). Faith seems to advocate passive submission and depoliticises her position, since she conceives of herself as a punished sinner rather than a victim of domestic abuse.

However, despite the potential for isolation as a romantic heroine and disempowerment as a penitent sinner, in the fusion of these self-identifications Ryan maintains a sense of her personal value and finds a means of social belonging. Ryan's conversion is never a submissive return of the prodigal daughter to the care of her earthly and heavenly fathers, as she transforms the sins of her past into a guarantee of her exclusive relationship to God. In contrast to Mary Tooth's anxious self-comparisons, she notes:

At night heard some letters read – and was delighted to see my Lord had some children who could glorify him much more than me – but O my father let me not be behind – for none has more cause to praise and love thee than myself.²²⁴

Ryan's insistence on a unique spiritual identity is potentially in conflict with the Methodist commitment to corporate fellowship, common patterns, and collective reformation. This tension is revealed in her clash with John Wesley in their intimate correspondence. In general their letters consist of spiritual counsel, Wesley's confidences regarding his unhappy marriage, and expressions of attachment. Wesley comments to Ryan in a letter of 1758 that 'I cannot think of you without thinking of God. Others often lead me to Him; but it is, as it were, going round about: you bring me straight into His presence'.²²⁵ Mary Fletcher's 'Some Further Account of Mrs Ryan' reveals that the correspondence inspired Wesley's wife to shout at a Methodist conference dinner "'see that whore, who is serving you! She hath three Husbands now alive'".²²⁶ However, while the nature of Ryan's friendship with Wesley remains ambiguous, the relationship seems to have been premised on a forthright exchange in which Ryan's independent spirituality challenged Wesley's corporate faith. In a letter of 1766, Wesley enumerates his concerns:

²²⁴ Sarah Ryan, 'Diary Extracts', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 47.

²²⁵ *Letters of John Wesley*, IV, 4.

²²⁶ Mary Fletcher, 'Some Further Account of Mrs Ryan', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 24, MS II, 35.

You sometimes seem to think too highly of yourself, and (comparatively) to despise others. I will instance in two or three particulars: - 1. You appear to be above instruction – I mean instruction from man. I do not doubt but you are taught of God. But that does not supersede your being taught by man also. [...] 2. You appear to think (I will not affirm you do), that none understands the doctrine of Sanctification like you. Nay, you sometimes speak as if none understood it besides you: [...] 3. You appear to undervalue the experience of almost every one in comparison of your own.²²⁷

In these indictments, Wesley suggests that Ryan constructs her spirituality in opposition to the crowd and rejects earthly mediations of her relationship to God. However, while Ryan refuses to imagine herself as a representative subject like Mary Fletcher, she nonetheless retains her sense of spiritual autonomy from within the social and religious networks of Wesleyan Methodism.

Ryan's substitution of a spiritual pilgrimage for a romantic quest is not simply a transition from sexual exploitation within marriage to dependence on male instruction and submission to the will of God. As Mary Fletcher eloquently expresses it, 'in the fragments I have gathered of my Dear and valuable friend, may be seen something of her spirit rather the spirit of her Lord Reigning in her' (p. 1). Ryan keeps herself in view, never simply a vessel for the 'Lord' or the embodiment of her spiritual community. In her experimentation with both spiritual and sentimental forms and her ability to cast herself as the heroine of her own self-determined narrative, Ryan looks forward to the writers of the next chapter. For in their diverse self-representations, in which sexual rather than spiritual identity is the dominant mode of self-definition, the courtesans reveal the difficulties of being both a self-authored heroine and a socially connected subject.

²²⁷ *Letters of John Wesley*, V, 17.

TWO

'Conceive the Whole as a Fable': The Life Writing of Late Eighteenth-Century Courtesans

In this chapter, I turn away from sexless souls to gendered bodies and consider the life writing of late eighteenth-century courtesans. We might expect little similarity between Quaker and Methodist writers, whose identity is determined by spiritual progress and religious belonging, and the courtesans, whose selfhood is publicly defined in social, economic, and sexual terms. However, my argument that the courtesan is both subject to a well-worn script and yet, at the same time, author of her own fiction revisits questions of female identity and self-representation raised in the opening chapter. Both groups create their identities in dialogue with social networks, articulate their personal experience within shared literary forms, and imagine their life writing as an address to a community of readers. However, the Quakers and Methodists understand spiritual autobiography as an expression of dependence on God and a textual confirmation of their membership of a religious fellowship. In contrast, the courtesans write as self-authorising and self-vindicating subjects, presenting themselves and their texts to the public without communal or divine sanction. In general, they draw on literary genres rather than on scriptural analogies and cast themselves as heroines of self-determined narratives rather than as exemplary subjects of 'providential' histories. The courtesan speaks from a position out of 'connexion' (to borrow from the language of Methodism) and writes against the grain of public conceptions of her identity. Instead of a narrative of spiritual conversion, the courtesan's life is understood as a 'fall' from moral grace into a state of social exile. However, in her life writing, she attempts to re-establish the connection between past and present and finds a retrospective means of social belonging in a circle of readers.

In my analysis of Quaker and Methodist writers, I stress the enabling potential of an identity created through self-determined affiliation and highlight the problems for women of relational selfhood taken to a selfless extreme. In my exploration of the self-representations of women who inhabit the role of courtesan during the 1770s and 1780s, I remain preoccupied with the relationship between personal identity and

social being. However, I turn to the question of whether constructing the self as a heroine is an empowering rhetorical strategy for women defined by their marginal status and consider the cultural authority of different models of female authorship. These writers resist public portrayal as an image of sexual transgression and exploit conventional tropes of feminine sensibility in order to express their irregular lives and re-establish a social connection. In the process, they write themselves back into recognisable roles as moral guardians, satirical commentators, sentimental heroines, Romantic artists, and family chroniclers. Yet, at the same time, their writing demonstrates the precariousness of a position out of 'connexion' and reveals that dependence on sexual and literary commerce places female selfhood under pressure. In their life writing, there is always the potential for these women to reinforce repressive stereotypes in their self-portrayal as the passive victims of male seduction or the sexual objects of voyeuristic pleasure. In addition, in their fictional identifications, they may relinquish a sense of personal history to the social imperative for self-reinvention or detach private suffering from collective female experience.

My discussion focuses on the biography of Sophia Baddeley (written by her companion Elizabeth Steele), the posthumously published memoir of Mary Robinson, and the manuscript *Journal of Elizabeth Fox*. All three women transgress conventional narratives of sex and class at the end of the eighteenth century, exchanging feminine domesticity for financial independence and a public female character. For Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson life writing enables self-authorship and self-vindication, as they perform a textual conversion from silent public commodity to speaking subject. In articulating their personal histories through conventional literary forms, they challenge their social exile, appeal to a sympathetic readership, and resist inscription within a narrative of sexual conversion.¹ In *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley* (1787), Elizabeth Steele presents her relationship with the courtesan Sophia Baddeley as a companionate marriage. She locates Baddeley within the domestic sphere, recuperates her public reputation, and establishes both women as protagonists in their

¹ For a discussion of the connection between tropes of spiritual and sexual conversion in mid-eighteenth-century scandalous memoirs, see Felicity Nussbaum, 'Heteroclitics: The Gender of Character in the Scandalous Memoirs', in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. by Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 144-67 (p. 158).

own sentimental romance. This fantasy of personal identity is also a social satire and a feminist polemic. Steele challenges sexual double standards, domestic abuse, financial exploitation, and social hypocrisy and attaches this shared private history to a generalised narrative of female experience. However, ultimately Steele's desire for autonomy is undermined by her social and economic dependence. Her text is therefore a testament to the pressures exerted by the sexual and literary marketplace on women's self-representations and social interventions.

In her *Memoirs* (1801), Robinson mirrors Steele's strategy of juxtaposing alternative models of female selfhood and presents herself simultaneously as a figure of erotic fascination and polite respectability. However, Robinson rejects Steele's fusion of sentiment and satire and finds an alternative to her cross-gendered identifications and self-definition as the heroic champion of her sex. Instead, Robinson engages in a dual process of self-fictionalisation as the sentimental heroine and literary self-fashioning as the Romantic writer. She translates her sense of social exile into a source of literary authority and public sympathy. In addition, she presents her decision to embark on a literary career as the inevitable consequence of her unique sensibility, domestic duties, and desire for financial independence. At times, grounding her literary identity in sensibility, singularity, and introspection seems to limit her capacity for social connection and reveals the potential for solipsism at the heart of the discourse of sensibility. However, while Robinson's *Memoirs* reveals the divisive effects of sexual reputation, by attempting to fashion a feminised narrative of artistic development she is able to imagine herself posthumously inscribed within a future tradition of female genius.

The life writing of Elizabeth Fox presents a striking contrast to Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson's impulse to shape their lives into a continuous history, engage with their 'disreputable' pasts, and cast themselves as the heroines of their own narratives. Elizabeth Fox's manuscript *Journal* that covers the period 1806 to 1841 has never before been the subject of literary analysis. In contrast to the published works of Steele and Robinson, the *Journal* is neither a public history nor a posthumous self-vindication. Instead, it is an act of ongoing self-creation and daily self-revision more immediately comparable to the spiritual journals of Methodists Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth. Rather than challenging the public narrative of her sexual conversion,

Elizabeth Fox prefers to travel incognito and finds coherence through self-inscription in a perpetual present. In the apparently 'private' space of her Journal, she creates her identity through personal attachments, altruism, and membership of the political and social milieu of the Foxite Whigs. The privacy and immediacy of the diary form allows her to avoid explicit engagement with the 'sins' of her past. Instead, she constructs a highly personalised model of autobiographical history and imagines her marriage to Charles James Fox as a moment of spiritual, emotional, and social rebirth. She rejects Steele's advice to 'conceive the whole as a fable' and turns to history rather than fiction in search of analogies for her personal experience. This resistance to becoming the heroine of her own text is a source of creative freedom, public agency, and social belonging. However, like the life writing of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth, the Journal suggests that living in a state of dependency potentially results in a loss of self-worth, anxious self-regulation, and a sense of 'belatedness'. At times, Mrs Fox becomes displaced from her self-portrait by a cast of characters and is detached from her writing present through her commitment to a collective history. The Journal therefore suggests that Mrs Fox's resistance to the role of the heroine and her desire to become a representative subject may lead to a loss of critical self-consciousness. However, as the *Memoirs* of Steele and Robinson reveal, becoming the heroine is only an empowering mode of personal expression and political intervention if the author retains a sense of social connection.

The character of the courtesan: scandal, satire, and sentiment

In recent studies, the courtesan is characterised as an individual who transgressed the boundaries of class, social space, and sexual morality, while situated at the 'pinnacle of a continuum of women who traded their bodies and their company for financial reward'.² The eighteenth-century courtesan was part of an elite sub-culture that was constituted by shared entertainments and seasons, constructed discursively by gossip and the periodical press, and reinforced visually by fashion and portraiture.³ Her self-

² Katie Hickman, *Courtesans* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003), pp. 1-28; Frances Wilson, *The Courtesan's Revenge: Harriette Wilson, the Woman Who Blackmailed the King* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp. 20-28; and Virginia Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales: The Lives and Legends of Four Nineteenth-Century Courtesans* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 9.

³ E. J. Burford, *Royal St. James's: Being a Story of Kings, Clubmen and Courtesans* (London: Robert Hale, 1988); Venetia Murray, *High Society: A Social History of the Regency Period 1788-1830* (London: Viking, 1998).

image and personal history were tradable commodities that circulated rapidly in caricatures, scandalous memoirs, and the popular press, in an era fascinated by the private lives of public characters.⁴ The *Tête-à-Tête* series of the *Town and Country Magazine*, published from 1769 to 1792, exemplified this obsession. The paper provided textual and visual portraits of couplings of the fashionable *demi monde* and *bon ton*, such as Elizabeth Fox and the Earl of Derby in March 1779 and Mary Robinson and Lord Malden in May 1780.⁵ The reports were a blend of fact, gossip, and fiction and vacillated in tone between voyeuristic titillation, satirical scandal, and moral commentary.⁶ As Lynda Thompson argues, the life writing of eighteenth-century courtesans inhabited an amorphous literary space, populated by fictional memoirs, whore biographies, secret histories, criminal conversation literature, political apologies, true confessions, and actors' memoirs.⁷ Women therefore attained 'a market place in which to sell their mental image', as Janet Todd suggests.⁸ But their self-representations also remained entangled in a network of voices and representations for, as Clare Brant expresses it, 'writing is in the case of these texts not an issue of breaking silence but stilling tongues.'⁹

In eighteenth-century sources, the courtesan is typically presented in opposition to a domestic ideal of privacy, frugality, self-regulation, and modesty. The biographical collection *Characters of the Present Most Celebrated Courtezans* (1780) represents Sophia Baddeley as the victim of her unruly desires, claiming that her final years were characterised 'by a dreadful and excessive indulgence in love, liquor, lust, and laudanum'.¹⁰ In addition to this emphasis on the physical body, the work also associates the courtesan with relentless social ambition and mobility. Elizabeth Fox is portrayed as 'the Daughter of a reputable Tradesman at Greenwich' who, 'having a

⁴ Stella Tillyard, "'Paths of Glory": Fame and the Public in Eighteenth-Century London', in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, ed. by Martin Postle, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 61-69, (p. 64).

⁵ *Town and Country Magazine; or, Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction and Entertainment*, March 1779, pp. 121-25; and *Town and Country*, May 1780, pp. 233-36.

⁶ Cindy McCreery, 'Keeping Up with the *Bon Ton*: The *Tête-à-Tête* Series in the *Town and Country Magazine*', in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 207-29 (p. 228).

⁷ Lynda M. Thompson, *The 'Scandalous Memoirists': Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the Shame of 'Publick Fame'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 147-58.

⁸ Janet Todd, *Gender, Art and Death* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 82.

⁹ Clare Brant, 'Speaking of Women: Scandal and the Law in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, ed. by Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 242-70 (p. 266).

¹⁰ Anon., *Characters of the Present Most Celebrated Courtezans* (London: M. James, 1780), p. 42.

soul not formed for the dull participation of Bourgeois Society', chose her lovers in order to 'acquire new graces and a brighter polish'.¹¹ In John Williams's satirical poem *The Children of Thespis* (1787), Baddeley is configured as 'an eminent instance of feminine terror / A public example to keep us from error'.¹² For Williams, Baddeley's tragic life confirms that a meteoric rise to fame leads inevitably to disease, poverty, and premature death. The courtesan was a figure who emulated the self-display, extravagant excess, and pursuit of pleasure associated with the aristocrat. Yet, at the same time, she fulfilled this role for money as a professional workingwoman. She therefore destabilised the opposition on which the bourgeois ideal of domestic femininity was based.¹³

Recent critical discussions of the life writing of eighteenth-century courtesans by Clare Brant, Vivien Jones, Michael Mascuch, and Felicity Nussbaum focus on the mid-century genre of the scandalous memoir.¹⁴ In addition, the work of Lynda Thompson and Janet Todd presents a comparative analysis of the form across the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Debate centres on the instability of the genre and the relationship between self-representation and dominant narratives of female character. Felicity Nussbaum argues that these women writers 'recuperate and sabotage the (male) culture's signifying practices about gender and identity through their texts'.¹⁶ Michael Mascuch critiques Nussbaum's position, claiming that the absence of unity in these texts is the result of an interpretative failure on the part of the author rather than a rhetorical strategy of resistance. He suggests that ultimately the scandalous memoirists adopt a 'masculine' 'ideal of an upwardly mobile, self-made subject'.¹⁷ However, Mascuch's account overlooks the sexual and political implications of this 'unified' self and denies the composite, revisionary, and relational identities which

¹¹ *Characters*, pp. 17 and 21.

¹² John Williams, *The Children of Thespis* (Dublin: T. McDonnell, 1787), p. 19.

¹³ For a discussion of the ideological construction of the domestic woman, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 59-95.

¹⁴ Brant, pp. 242-70; Vivien Jones, 'Scandalous Femininity: Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Narrative', in *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), pp. 54-70; Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 189-201; Nussbaum, 'Heteroclitics', pp. 144-67.

¹⁵ Thompson; and Todd, *Gender, Art and Death*, pp. 81-95.

¹⁶ Nussbaum, 'Heteroclitics', p. 167.

¹⁷ Mascuch, pp. 199-200.

language of sensibility enabled a fantasy of intimacy, transparency, and accessibility for readers. Yet, as Spacks also notes, it provided women writers with a public performance that could be adapted in order to disguise the realities of their personal histories and present circumstances.²² Women writers who drew on the language of sensibility at the end of the eighteenth century evoked dangerous associations with affectation, self-display, and sexual excess that was a dominant strand within the anti-sentimental discourse of the 1790s.²³ But in their struggles to recuperate and reclaim their reputations they participated in the redemption and redirection of sensibility. For as the work of Markman Ellis, Gillian Skinner, and Harriet Guest demonstrates, apparently privatised languages of feeling enabled political, social, and moral debates to be publicly expressed.²⁴

In Elizabeth Steele's *Memoirs*, sentiment coexists with satire and Steele looks back to an earlier tradition of the referential scandal chronicle associated with women writers such as Delarivier Manley.²⁵ However, the general decline of satire and scandal in favour of sentimental expression suggests that during this period women writers discover a public authority in a privatised language of femininity rather than a public discourse of political gossip.²⁶ Therefore, these women writers also engage with questions of female authorship and the literary conventions of Romanticism. Their life writing reveals the consequences of a shift from satirical eye to sympathetic heart as the dominant mode of women's public interventions and allows us to explore the implications of a range of literary genres for women writers who attempt to speak in their own voices on behalf of their sex.

²² Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 56.

²³ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 129-46; and Ellis, pp. 190-221.

²⁴ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of A Tear* (London: Macmillan, 1999); and Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²⁵ Rosalind Ballaster, 'Manl(e)y Forms: Sex and the Female Satirist', in *Women, Texts and Histories* (see Brant, above), pp. 217-41.

²⁶ Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989), pp. 128-31.

emerge in works that frequently problematise the connection between author and text. My study also engages with Julia Swindells's analysis of nineteenth-century working women's autobiography. Swindells argues that identifying with the figure of the romantic heroine may distort women writers' self-expression and sever them from collective female experience.¹⁸ In contrast to the labouring women of Swindells's study, for Steele and Robinson fictional identifications have the potential to serve a personally liberating, socially connective, and financially rewarding function. However, building on Swindells's discussion, I wish to explore the ways in which literary conventions shape women's public interventions in this period and consider the implications of the literary models they adopt. My argument that the courtesan is an individual in charge of an idiom rather than limited to a script, in a culture characterised by fictionalising, self-fashioning, and personal fantasy, also draws on the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman. His argument that the individual is a 'performer' involved in the work of staging a self through impression management suggests that socially determined narratives of identity may provide a means to experience and articulate a life rather than inevitably acting as a form of constraint.¹⁹

My analysis contributes to the ongoing critical debate surrounding the discourse of sensibility and its diverse characterisation as both an empowering re-evaluation of femininity and a disabling set of social dictates.²⁰ Jennie Batchelor argues that 'once made discursively available, the ideal of morally adorned femininity became a model which women might reject, accept or deploy as a device through which to gain approval and conceal moral transgression'.²¹ In practice, Elizabeth Steele, Mary Robinson, and Elizabeth Fox resisted confinement within the domestic sphere and the patriarchal family. But by adopting the tropes of sentiment, domesticity, and maternity they translated themselves back into the role of socially connected subjects. As Patricia Meyer Spacks's discussion of eighteenth-century privacy suggests, the

¹⁸ Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), pp. 163-71.

¹⁹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), pp. 15-16 and 252-55.

²⁰ For a discussion of the implications of the culture of sensibility for women writers, see Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 37-38; and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xxvii-xxviii.

²¹ Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 18.

**‘Credit the Truth’: The Fabulous Life of Sophia Baddeley (1745-1786) and
Elizabeth Steele (1741-1787)**

In the *Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley* (1787), Elizabeth Steele exploits the generic flexibility of the scandalous memoir in order to recuperate Sophia Baddeley’s posthumous reputation, explore a fantasy of personal identity, and articulate a social critique. She reclaims Baddeley from public portrayal as a symbol of sexual and social excess, inscribes her within the domestic sphere, and imagines their unconventional bond as a companionate marriage. But rather than rehearsing familiar roles, Steele’s fluid model of self-composition and cross-gendered identifications transforms conventional fictional narratives into liberating fantasies. In this fusion of sentimental romance and picaresque adventure, expressed in a text punctuated by cross-dressing, bed swapping, and duels, she attempts to expand conceptions of gender, conjugality, and domesticity. However, this private history is also a satire of fashionable society that translates Baddeley and Steele’s personal experience of violence, financial exploitation, and sexual double standards into a generalised social commentary. The tradition of the referential scandal chronicle, which transformed gossip and voyeurism into a powerful mode of female agency, is combined with sentimental romance and a narrative of moral reform. In addition to generic innovation, Steele’s seductive narrative of co-authored identity and shared personal history presents an implicit challenge to the myth of Romantic authorship. The *Memoirs* cannot be imagined simply as a liberating instance of autonomous self-expression, since the narrative is written in dialogue with scandal and hearsay (or the ‘choric’ to take Clare Brant’s term).²⁷ In addition, it is shaped by the economic and political agendas of Steele’s publisher and possible ghostwriter. The pressures and structures of the marketplace therefore impact the terms of Baddeley and Steele’s public intervention. Nevertheless, the *Memoirs* is a self-determined narrative of female co-authorship in which personal history and social criticism are able to coexist.

²⁷ Brant, p. 244.

'I will never be at the disposal of any man'

The *Memoirs* focuses on the period 1769 to 1774, when Baddeley was at the height of her fame as an actress, singer, and courtesan and was living with Steele in London's fashionable West End.²⁸ Steele identifies herself as a lifelong 'friend and confidante' to Baddeley.²⁹ However, throughout the *Memoirs* their connection remains highly ambiguous; perhaps a sentimental friendship, lesbian relationship, or business arrangement in which Steele acted as Baddeley's procuress. Steele gallops her readers from the Opera House to Ranelagh and from Paris to Portsmouth, just as she drove Baddeley's carriage across London with alarming speed and regularity, a pace apparently described by Sophia as '*going like herself*' (IV, 165). Steele equates sexuality with power, triumphantly recalling that 'the notice of Mrs Baddeley was at that day sufficient to give credit and eclat to a man of the ton' (I, 71). This exchange of sex and social credit for financial gain allows the women to live temporarily without economic restraint or reference to their social origins, as Steele notes that Baddeley 'made an appearance equal to a woman of the first rank' (II, 161). Baddeley's long-term protector Lord Melbourne (Peniston Lamb) offers her a 'share of his fortune, in exchange for the possession of her heart' (I, 75). As a consequence, he enables these two daughters of court employees to decorate their drawing room in the style of Madame du Barry's room at Versailles, surround themselves with liveried servants, and spend seven hundred pounds in an afternoon's shopping spree.

Economic independence was apparently coupled with self-government in their personal relationships, since both women rejected patriarchal control and conventional models of family life. In the *Memoirs*, Steele suggests that Baddeley eloped with the actor Robert Baddeley in 1764 in order to escape from her father's 'overbearing and tyrannical' (I, 5) efforts to educate her in the art of the harpsichord. Yet, countering this narrative of female victimisation, she also claims that Baddeley

²⁸ Baddeley made her acting debut as Ophelia at Drury Lane in 1764, and achieved great success in genteel comedies. She also performed at David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford in September 1769, and was engaged as a singer at Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Finch's Grotto. *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, ed. by Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Longhans, 16 vols (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973-93), I, 202-08.

²⁹ Elizabeth Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley*, 6 vols (London: Literary Press, 1787), I, 2. In this section, further references to *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley* are given after quotations in the text.

was motivated by ‘a *penchant* for a theatrical life’ (I, 6), to which Robert Baddeley provided access. Baddeley’s estrangement from her husband in 1767 is presented as a further liberation from masculine authority.³⁰ Steele insists that, throughout her career as a courtesan, Baddeley refused to accept formal settlements from her male protectors in order to ensure that ‘she would never be *wholly* at the disposal of any man’ (VI, 157). When a young Oxford student offers to sue Robert Baddeley for divorce, she allegedly declares:

I will not be his wife notwithstanding; nor will I be the wife of any man; for I can never submit to the controul of a husband, or put it in his power to say I have been imprudent in life. (IV, 110-11)

Steele’s narrative repeatedly evokes the heterosexual ideal of companionate marriage, as she comments that ‘let a woman enjoy all the indulgencies of wedlock, where honour cements the union; and her gratitude and fidelity will be beyond surprise and interruption’ (VI, 190). In addition, she casts herself as the defender of family unity, lecturing married men on their domestic duties and declaring ‘if I could have my will, one and all of you married gentlemen, should find your happiness in your own houses, or you should be made to suffer, in searching for it elsewhere’ (II, 214). However, there is a disjunction between rhetoric and reality that is revealed in Steele’s self-identification as ‘a married woman, though I did not live with my husband’ (III, 28). She maintains that she and Mr Steele ‘were on good terms’ (III, 29) and notes occasional family visits and her efforts to ‘do something for them’ (V, 174). But she rarely integrates her households or personae, living her life along parallel lines as if her existence with Baddeley provides an alternative to domestic confinement or contentment.

However, despite this rejection of domesticity in practice, in the *Memoirs* Steele deploys domesticity as a trope and adapts conventional images of femininity, sensibility, and conjugality in her attempts to reclaim Baddeley’s reputation. In the public imagination, Baddeley was notorious for her ‘personal attractions’, ‘insatiate Lust’, and a lack of ‘prudence and economy’.³¹ Caroline Gonda argues that ‘if female

³⁰ According to the *Town and Country Magazine*, the Baddeleys officially separated in March 1770, following a bloodless duel in Hyde Park between George Garrick and Robert Baddeley. However, it was generally acknowledged that the couple had been estranged since 1767. *Town and Country*, March 1770, pp. 157-58; and Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 202.

³¹ *Town and Country*, May 1772, p. 234; Williams, p. 19; and *Town and Country*, May 1776, p. 237.

virtue is coded as that which is private and silent' then women's public virtue must be 'a contradiction in terms'.³² By relocating Baddeley within the private sphere, the *Memoirs* allows her moral character to displace her sexualised body. Steele attempts to restore depth and interiority to a figure defined by surface and self-display and adopts a vocabulary of modesty, frugality, and domestic economy:

Though we had all sorts of French and Spanish wines, to entertain our noble friends with, when they did us the honour to dine with us, and our table was set out with elegance; yet when we dined alone, a single joint served us for dinner, and nothing was drank but small beer. As lived our servants, so did we. (II, 197-98)

Steele opposes bourgeois values of inconspicuous consumption to the decadent excess of a corrupt aristocracy and converts male aristocratic fortunes into feminine domestic pleasures.

Steele also draws on a language of sentiment and foregrounds Baddeley's feeling heart over her 'lustful' body. She stresses Baddeley's commitment to filial duty and catalogues her gifts to her servants and fellow actresses. The narrative is also densely populated by illustrations of Baddeley's 'beneficent acts' that, according to Steele, 'proceeded from an innate sensibility and feeling for the distresses of others' (II, 103). In a sentimental tale embedded within the *Memoirs*, Steele recalls the women's encounter with a weeping girl in Hyde Park who had been turned out of home by her father after a secret romance. The chance meeting between a naive young girl and a procuress evokes the opening motif of William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* (1732). However, Steele deliberately resists the conventional plot and faces the wrath of the father in order to 'bring about a reconciliation' (III, 215). In their own lives, Steele and Baddeley reject the narrative of the return of the prodigal daughter to paternal protection that was a common plot in the memoirs of their scandalous forbears, such as Charlotte Charke and Constantia Phillips. However, in restoring the vulnerable young woman to her family and saving her from prostitution, they establish that in their female household compassion and benevolence took precedence over economic gain and sexual exploitation.

³² Caroline Gonda, 'Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 53-71 (p. 66).

Steele's most successful and persistent strategy for liberating herself and Baddeley from the roles of bawd and courtesan is to configure their unconventional bond as an idealised companionate marriage. She portrays Baddeley as 'a tender and endearing partner of domestic life' (VI, 189) and recalls the 'placid satisfaction, that no place, but home with quiet, affords' (II, 104). In this domestic portrait, she depicts the women gossiping and dressmaking, while surrounded by their beloved cats and canaries. Baddeley appears bound by both obligation and affection and, on one occasion, she allegedly declares 'she would share what she had with me, as she was indebted to me for her happiness; and her life, without my esteem and company, would be intolerable' (I, 77). Betty Rizzo argues that this 'female coalition against patriarchy' ultimately replicates the unequal power relations of the companionate marriage, with Steele playing the 'ruling' husband to Baddeley's 'submissive' and 'manipulative' wife.³³ The *Memoirs* does reveal Steele's regulatory technologies and regimes of surveillance. She plays the voyeur, listens at keyholes, vets the suitability of visitors, locks doors, and leaves the house only when Baddeley is safely ensconced with the hairdresser. Meanwhile, Baddeley engages in secret correspondence and clandestine meetings with her latest beau in order to undermine and evade Steele's control. However, alongside this narrative of mutual exploitation, the *Memoirs* presents a model of interdependent selfhood and co-authored personal identity that is expressed in a democratic text in which both voices can be heard.

The *Memoirs* provides a record of Baddeley's resistance to Steele's attempts to fashion her personal identity and regulate her conduct. She frequently asserts her independence, declaring "'my person is my own, and I will do with it as I please'" and "'will not be debarred from *seeing* who I please, and *doing* with them what I please'" (III, 141-42). By allowing the courtesan to talk back and disrupt the dominant voice of the narrative, Steele is never fully in control of the effects of her text. This incoherence is noted in the *Critical Review*'s claim that the *Memoirs* lacked 'a little connection, some decorum, and consistency'.³⁴ In these moments of confrontation that shatter the shared history into a cacophony of competing voices,

³³ Rizzo, p. 216. This interpretation of Baddeley and Steele's relationship is consistent with Janet Todd's characterisation of 'manipulative' female friendships in the eighteenth-century novel. Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 327-40.

³⁴ *Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature*, June 1787, p. 480.

Steele establishes the depth of the women's emotional bond. She recalls that on one occasion when she threatens to leave home, Baddeley:

Flew to me, took me fast into her arms, and cried, and sobbed so much, that it made my heart ach: she then fell on her knees, begged my pardon, and declared, if I left her, she would stab herself the next minute. (III, 145)

It is crucial to Steele's self-conception that her bond with Baddeley takes precedence over any romantic or professional entanglement. She often asserts, in contradiction to the evidence of her narrative, that 'Mrs Baddeley traversed the gay scenes of life, with a heart disengaged from the trammels of love' (I, 22). Baddeley's intellectual and sexual boredom with her protector Lord Melbourne is implicit in her frequent headaches (that coincide with his arrival and departure) and her characterisation of his absences as her 'holidays' (III, 11). However, in addition to Melbourne, Steele suggests that Baddeley 'was restless, unless she had, at the same time, a favourite visitor of her own choice, to whom she might, when she pleased, bestow her unbought favours' (II, 217). Unlike the procession of aging aristocrats, these 'favourite visitors' (generally young officers or undergraduates) threaten Steele's carefully constructed domestic idyll. For the *Memoirs* stages a bitter rivalry for Baddeley's affections, structured into a clash between abusive and inconstant lovers and the loyal hero Mrs Steele.

The women's partnership and co-habitation began following Baddeley's suicide attempt in the aftermath of her abandonment by her lover John Hanger at the age of twenty-four. In this narrative of seduction and betrayal, Steele becomes Baddeley's rescuer, extricating 'her from every difficulty' (I, 34) and establishing a joint-residence for the two women in St James's Place.³⁵ The *Memoirs* presents Steele and Baddeley as protagonists in their own sentimental romance, displacing a traditional 'heterosexual plot' onto a narrative of female friendship.³⁶ However, as Cora Kaplan argues, romance narratives may invite identification across sexual difference and allow women to inhabit a range of subject positions simultaneously.³⁷ Steele imagines herself as an ideal alternative to Baddeley's male 'protectors' and foregrounds her ability to offer Baddeley both financial and emotional security. She remarks that 'if

³⁵ Betty Rizzo suggests that a rich protector or a consortium of young men from the clubs of St James's may have financed this relocation. Rizzo, p. 203.

³⁶ Todd, *Friendship*, p. 2.

³⁷ Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 120.

she would confide in me for her pilot, I would soon steer her into a safe harbour, in which she might lay snug and secure from the dangers of a stormy world' (V, 179). However, at the same time, Steele presents her love as a series of self-destructive sacrifices, aligning herself with Baddeley's ruined and infatuated suitors:

Of course it was not to be disputed; that, I had given her my little fortune, which I had for years worked for, and did not repine; that, I had also forsaken my husband, neglected my family, and given her myself, and would now give up my life, if necessary, to serve her. (V, 221)

Usurping the role of victim from Baddeley, Steele suggests her relationship is a 'strange infatuation' that would inevitably end in 'ruin' (V, 204-05). In her study of eighteenth-century actresses, Kristina Straub argues for 'a somewhat less all-or-nothing approach' to the question of female sexuality. She suggests that the figure of the actress 'may gesture toward possible sites of resistance to dominant sexual ideology'.³⁸ In the *Memoirs*, Steele plays with conventions of gender and sexuality and fashions a sexualised model of female authorship that is reminiscent of Aphra Behn or Delarivier Manley. She fights off a 'foot-pad, in the Hammersmith-road' (VI, 55), brandishes a pistol to defend Baddeley from her lover's kidnap attempt, and impersonates a man in a French inn in a sexual farce of mistaken identity. She revels in these opportunities to 'forget my sex' (V, 31), as she expresses it, and triumphantly concludes that she is 'fitter for a man, than a woman' (V, 46). This heroic masculine persona is created out of her relationship to Baddeley and reinforced by her role as the writer and reader of a shared romance. However, at times, Steele is overwhelmed by her desire to play the lead. This tendency reaches its apex in the fifth volume, when Steele relocates the action to Ireland and recasts herself as the picaresque hero while Baddeley is left waiting in the wings. In this productive fusion of sentimental romance and picaresque adventure, Steele transforms conventional narratives into liberating fantasies and revives a model of female authorship from an earlier era.

'Whilst I level at one, I do not miss the crowd'

In addition to exploring the textual pleasures of fictional identifications, Steele mobilises the women's personal experience to produce a compelling social critique. As Lynda Thompson argues in her discussion of Constantia Phillips and Laetitia

³⁸ Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 21-22.

Pilkington, 'beneath the gloss of sexual innuendo and flirtatiousness they wrote about debt, penury, imprisonment, humiliation and violent abuse.'³⁹ Steele vividly recounts John Hanger's violent behaviour towards Baddeley, commenting that 'I have seen her arms black, from wrist to shoulder, and her neck also', She also recalls that, on one occasion, 'he gave me such a blow on the mouth, as beat out one of my double teeth' (II, 138-39). Steele refuses the role of passive victim and fights back both physically and textually. She threatens to horsewhip Hanger and exploits the public forum of print to ensure her verbal attacks reach the widest possible audience. In a self-reflexive moment, as much prophecy as reprimand, Steele remarks that she told Hanger 'he was a villain for using her as he had done; that I would expose him to the world for the sake of all women, that no other might be so deceived as she had been' (V, 123). In this moment, Steele seems not to 'forget her sex' but draws on her experience as the witness of abuse in order to speak in defence of all women. The sentimental fiction is abandoned for feminist polemic and Steele and Baddeley appear to have no need for a hero, as Steele puts Hanger on trial for his brutal beatings:

This charge of her's I knew to be a fact; he has often beat her in such a manner, that I have seen his cruel marks, and have wept over them. – Many of her friends, now living, will testify the same. (IV, 125)

Steele's transformation of the *Memoirs* into a displaced courtroom is consistent with Clare Brant's contention that the self-representation of scandalous women was shaped within and against legal discourse.⁴⁰ However, the particularities of Hanger's crime also provide an opportunity to place the character of the 'gentleman' in the dock, as Steele ironically remarks that 'from a man of his rank and title I had reason to expect the behaviour of a gentleman' (V, 7). This movement is consistent with Patricia Meyer Spacks's argument that in these texts uncovering 'scandalous privacies becomes a device for revealing more public scandals, rarely acknowledged as such'.⁴¹ By placing the collective term of the 'gentleman' under strain, Steele transforms the specific instance of domestic violence into evidence of class exploitation and a failure of aristocratic responsibility. In the process, she encourages her readers to link these failures in the domestic realm to the inadequacies of the social order.

³⁹ Thompson, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Brant, pp. 256 and 260.

⁴¹ Spacks, p. 164.

In the *Memoirs*, Steele targets both the particular and the general. She presents the work as a profitable act of extortion, public vengeance, and vindication. Yet, at the same time, she imagines it as ‘a lesson to some of my young readers, to be upon their guard, against the treachery and deceptions of man’ (II, 165). In her self-identification as a moralist she compares herself to the ‘most chaste and correct writers’, commenting ‘I have thrown the cap at individuals; they fling it at the crowd; but, whilst I level at one, I do not miss the crowd’ (VI, 196). Reviewers generally concurred with this ambivalence. The *Critical Review* presents the *Memoirs* as a work in which ‘characters are unfeelingly wounded, and the peace of families wantonly sported with’.⁴² However, the *Monthly Review* teases out the reformist power of the *exposé*, declaring “Gallants, beware! look sharp! take care!” For, sooner or later, *all will out*; and then, brothers, uncles, fathers, aye and grandfathers too, will stand exposed, as in these volumes’.⁴³

The satiric tradition is blended with a generalised discourse of sentiment that was familiar to readers from reformist narratives of seduction, such as *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House* (1760).⁴⁴ There are difficulties associated with both forms. Anna Clark argues that satire potentially configures its audience as detached and amused spectators, whereas, Vivien Jones suggests that ‘the seduction narrative discovers, and seeks to contain, the prostitute as redeemable victim’.⁴⁵ However, in the combination of satire and sentiment, Baddeley is neither a distant object nor fully contained as the repentant sinner. Steele imports a moral vocabulary into her narrative, but Baddeley’s sexual ‘fall’ is always understood in social rather than spiritual terms. The strategic interweaving of sexual farce and social commentary collapses textual boundaries, as protagonists, biographer, and reader share a joke at the expense of aristocratic male dignity. Lord Palmerston falls over a camera obscura, a Jewish suitor falls off the sea bank in Brighton, the Neapolitan Ambassador is locked in a closet for half an hour, and Lord March is covered with the contents of a servant’s pail. These accidents generate fits of ‘immoderate’ (II, 51) and ‘involuntary’ (I, 60) laughter, while Steele recalls ‘our maids laughed as heartily as

⁴² *Critical Review*, June 1787, p. 480.

⁴³ *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, July 1787, p. 83.

⁴⁴ Anon., *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House, as Supposed to Be Related by Themselves*, 2 vols (London: John Rivington and J. Dodsley, 1760); and Ellis, pp. 177-85.

⁴⁵ Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 219; and Jones, ‘Scandalous Femininity’, p. 55.

we did' (III, 204). The *Memoirs* frequently convenes an audience of working women around images of deflated male power and is a text that resounds with anarchic female laughter.

Steele's satirical observing eye and moralising tone is perpetually balanced by emotional involvement and personal affection. This combination of social insight and heartfelt lament is evident in her account of a meeting between Baddeley and her fellow actress and courtesan Mary Robinson in 1780. Steele presents the two women in Baddeley's bedroom, engaged in a sentimental exchange of their personal histories:

Mrs Baddeley gave her a particular account of the situation she was in, and the treatment she had experienced, from those who professed a friendship for her; which, when Mrs Robinson heard, she cried out. "Oh, the ingratitude of mankind!" And shed a few tears, unperceived by Mrs Baddeley. (VI, 176)

By 1780 Baddeley had suffered a dramatic decline and was living in poverty in Pimlico with a manservant, while struggling to support her family as a singer in an exhibition at Lisle Street. In the *Memoirs*, Steele presents Baddeley's 'fall' as a social and economic decline rather than a sexual transgression, revealing that the 'fall from all her splendor, to take up at last, with a man of this stamp, cut me to the soul' (VI, 181). The catalyst for this transformation was Baddeley's abandonment by Lord Melbourne and her socially damaging love affair with the American republican and Sheriff of London, Stephen Sayer. In contrast, Mary Robinson was at the height of her fame as courtesan to the Prince of Wales, evident in her visit to Baddeley in an 'elegant little phaeton' and her delivery of ten guineas from the Duke of Cumberland (VI, 174). At first glance, this staged interaction of 1780 measures the distance between Baddeley's past and present and juxtaposes contrasting images of the actress and courtesan on divergent narrative paths towards triumph and disaster. However, by 1787, Steele's audience would have been familiar with the unhappy outcome of Robinson's romance with the Prince of Wales. The 'unperceived' tears therefore imply that Robinson and Baddeley are enmeshed in a shared narrative as fellow victims of man's 'deceptions' and 'dissipation' (II, 165), only fully comprehended by the onlooker Mrs Steele.

‘Signed with her own hand’

Reading Baddeley’s intimate meeting with Robinson in 1780 by the light of the gossip columns of 1787 reveals the extent to which this personal portrait of a lost love interacts with events in the public sphere. The *Memoirs* is entwined in a network of commercial transactions that potentially disrupts the image of female autonomy staged in the text. For instance, embedded within the narrative is a thinly disguised advert for the latest novel of Dr John Trusler, who was Steele’s publisher and founder of the Literary Press.⁴⁶ Steele suggests that ‘a perusal’ of Trusler’s *Modern Times; or, the Adventures of Gabriel Outcast* ‘will be useful to hundreds’, noting that the work ‘has been considerably improved, and enlarged, since it was first published’ (IV, 86-87).⁴⁷ In addition, the economic function of the *Memoirs* as a work of blackmail and extortion undermines its status as an authoritative text. The aristocrats featured in the narrative (around one hundred and forty according to the *Morning Herald*) represent only those who refused to buy themselves out rather than a full cast of characters.⁴⁸

The *Memoirs*’ status as a commercial product was highlighted for its contemporary readership by a heated debate over copyright that was played out in the exchange of handbills and puffs and squibs in the newspapers. The contentious second edition appeared on 27 July 1787. Its entry into circulation was marked by an advertisement in the *Morning Herald* that suggests the complex negotiations involved in translating Baddeley and Steele’s irregular lives into print:

By advice of Counsel, the whole impression, consisting of many thousand volumes, is signed with her own hand, to preclude the possibility of Piracy, which she has too great reason to apprehend, from Dr. John Trusler, who, having appropriated the sums of money, which he received of the Booksellers for the first Edition, to his own use, obliged her to file a bill in chancery for the recovery of her right. She therefore wishes to intimate, that the venders of all books under the above title, without such signature of her name, are liable to prosecution, as the work is entered as her sole copy right, at Stationer’s-Hall.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The Literary Press was the printing house of the Literary Society, established in 1765 by John Trusler to promote literary merit. The committee of the society assessed the manuscripts that were submitted by aspiring authors and, if approved, works were published at the risk and expense of the society. The writer received any profits once the costs of publication had been recovered. *ODNB*, John Trusler.

⁴⁷ John Trusler, *Modern Times; or, The Adventures of Gabriel Outcast*, 3 vols (J. Murray: London, 1785).

⁴⁸ *Morning Herald*, 26 May 1787.

⁴⁹ *Morning Herald*, 27 July 1787.

Steele's desire to ensure the life 'is signed with her own hand' drew on an established precedent. The courtesan Constantia Phillips autographed each copy of *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs T. C. Phillips* (1748) to confirm the text's authenticity and reclaim her character from public ownership.⁵⁰ Catherine Gallagher demonstrates the creative possibilities for women writers in the displacements and disappearances enabled by the 'exchangeable tokens of modern authorship'.⁵¹ However, Steele's insistence on textual ownership also reveals the economic importance of retaining a degree of self-possession in the print marketplace.

Despite the physical imprint of the hand, Steele's *Memoirs* complicates the relationship between author and text. The work reinforces Paula McDowell's argument that the 'traditional "man-and-his-work" approaches, with their post-Romantic emphasis on individual authors, are not the most useful models for the study of non-élite men's and women's involvement in the print marketplace'.⁵² Contemporary reviewers and recent critics hint at the presence of textual collaborators (such as an editor or ghostwriter) whose shadowy presence troubles the *Memoirs* status as a female-authored text. There are claims that Steele may have worked with the hack journalist Alexander Bicknell, who was notorious for his satirical essays and his role as editor of *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy* (1785).⁵³ However, the more likely candidate is the journalist, Irish revolutionary, and spy William Jackson, identified by Betty Rizzo as Steele's assistant through her analysis of the correspondence of Stephen Sayer.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Teresia Constantia Muilman, *An Apology for the Conduct of Mrs T. C. Phillips*, 3 vols (London: the author, 1748).

⁵¹ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), xiii.

⁵² Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 12.

⁵³ George Anne Bellamy, *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy. Written by Herself*, ed. by Alexander Bicknell, 5 vols (London: the author, 1785); *Critical Review*, June 1787, p. 479; *Monthly Review*, July 1787, p. 83. More recently, John Fyvie and Steven Meyers have suggested that Bicknell may have collaborated with Steele. However, Donald Stauffer and Katie Hickman doubt these claims. See, John Fyvie, *Comedy Queens of the Georgian Era* (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), pp. 233-34; Steven Meyers, *A Dictionary of British and American Writers 1660-1800*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 296-97 (p. 297); Donald A. Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 47-48; and Hickman, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Rizzo, p. 363.

William Jackson's political commitments seem a recurrent subtext of the narrative. His editorship of the *Morning Post* from 1784 to 1786 was coloured by his support for William Pitt's government and, during the Westminster election in 1784, he launched satirical attacks on Charles James Fox under the pseudonym Scrutineer.⁵⁵ These political affiliations are reflected in the *Memoirs*' unflattering portrait of the 'mean and pitiful' Fox (VI, 10), whose 'professions' to Baddeley were 'neither desirable nor acceptable' (I, 88). The *Memoirs* also satirises the 'Wilkite model of "manly patriotism"', to take Kathleen Wilson's phrase, which linked libertarian politics and sexual transgression.⁵⁶ Baddeley's relationship to Stephen Sayer exposed the women to a radical milieu inconsistent with their former lives. Visitors to their home in Cleveland Row allegedly included the politician John Wilkes and the journalist Henry Bate, who was editor of the *Morning Post* from 1775 to 1780 and the *Morning Herald* from 1780 to 1804.⁵⁷ In the satirical portrait of Stephen Sayer cooking his beefsteaks over the dining room fire, Steele's personal hatred and Jackson's political allegiances appear to coalesce. The *Memoirs* depicts Sayer refusing to employ a servant as an expression of his radicalism. However, much to Steele's disgust, he 'called and ordered' Baddeley about and 'bad her do this and that for him' (VI, 125). Steele highlights the social consequences and sexual politics of 'manly patriotism', recounting Sayer's abandonment of the pregnant Baddeley in favour of marriage to a wealthy heiress nine years his senior. She converts 'private intelligence' into 'public political currency' and establishes herself as a spy in her comments on Sayer and his companions:⁵⁸

The conversation of these people ran in invectives against the Royal Family, whom they were pleased to speak so ill of, that I have often left the room with anger; and, thought they deserved a halter for their disaffection. His whole party was equally violent, and convinced me, that these men, who call themselves Patriots, have not a grain of real love for their country. (VI, 91-92)

However, the convergence between personal and political agendas is not always so seamless and at times the political subtext disrupts the consistency of the characterisations. When the thoroughly apolitical Baddeley claims that Sayer is 'a John Wilkes to his heart, which I love him the better for' (VI, 49) and Steele identifies

⁵⁵ ODNB, William Jackson.

⁵⁶ Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 219-20.

⁵⁷ ODNB, Henry Bate.

⁵⁸ McDowell, p. 21.

herself as a political informer to Lord North (V, 172), the voice of the ghostwriter seems at its most audible.

The form of the *Memoirs* shifts radically as a result of Baddeley's relationship with Sayer. The intimate narrative of dressmaking and masquerading is replaced by a montage of Baddeley's final years, patched together from gossip, correspondence, and occasional visits. Baddeley returned to acting in 1776, performing in theatres in London, Dublin, York, and Edinburgh while battling against drug addiction, ill health, and poverty. She died of consumption in July 1786 at the age of forty-one.⁵⁹ Steele claimed that she never saw Baddeley after 1780. However, according to the autobiography of Tate Wilkinson (manager of the York Theatre), Steele was with Baddeley during her season at York in 1783. Wilkinson remarks of Baddeley that 'her friend and companion, a *Mrs. Stell*, was with her, who I fancy had always occasion for such sums as that unfortunate woman received'.⁶⁰ There is a limited postscript to Steele's career from October 1787, when a reward for her arrest for fraud circulated with a satirical portrait in which she is depicted 'with a Mole on her left Cheek; her Mouth drawn aside, (apparently by a Paralytic Stroke) her Right Eye Blood-shot'.⁶¹ According to her obituary, which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* a month later, Steele died 'in the most extreme agonies and distress' and was 'buried in Bishopsgate church-yard, in a manner rather better than a common pauper'.⁶² This tragic and yet clichéd conclusion potentially writes Steele back into the narrative conventions she sought to escape, exemplified by the *Morning Post*'s configuration of the lives of Baddeley and Steele as morality tales which 'may make a proper and lasting impression on every female breast'.⁶³ These remarks reveal that women who defied conventional narratives of identity were at risk of re-inscription within a damaging stereotype. However, in the *Memoirs*, Baddeley and Steele remain the central characters of a drama played, if only temporarily, on their own terms.

⁵⁹ Obituary notices give Baddeley's age as thirty-seven, thirty-eight, and forty-two. Highfill, I, 207.

⁶⁰ Tate Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee; or, A History of The Yorkshire Theatres, from 1770 to the Present Time*, 4 vols (London: Wilson, Spence, and Mawman, 1795), II, 152.

⁶¹ The source is a handbill or newspaper extract from 19 October 1787, which is preserved in Daniel Lysons, *Collectanea; or, A Collection of Advertisements and Paragraphs from the Newspapers*, 4 vols (Strawberry-Hill: Thomas Kirgate, [1825(?)]), II, 1, fol. 76^v

⁶² *Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1787, p. 1033.

⁶³ *Morning Post*, 17 November 1787. Editions of the *Morning Post* for November 1787 do not exist in the Burney Collection in the British Library. However, this article is preserved in Lysons, II, 1, fol. 77^r

In a direct address to her reader, Steele asserts the authenticity of her narrative by contrasting ‘this simple diary of our proceedings’ with ‘a fabulous account of things that have no existence, but in fancy’ (II, 145). However, in practice, the *Memoirs* reveals that fact and fable may not be so easily disentangled. Steele reflects:

When I considered the many different parts I played in life, and the many more I had to play, I wondered at my own abilities, resolution and spirits; so many scenes have I gone through, and so many strange adventures have I met with, that in recounting them, I can scarce credit the truth of them myself, and am led sometimes to conceive the whole as a fable. (V, 65)

Steele claims that the fabulous reality of her life undermines the ‘credit’ of her history (a term that captures the relationship between economic and personal security at the heart of the *Memoirs*). However, conceptualising her existence in terms of parts, plays, scenes, and fables allows her to ‘credit’ this self-created identity that is produced out of her relationship to Baddeley. She fashions a composite model of selfhood, synthesising and transforming existing roles and conventional scripts. But rather than a form of escapism, the pleasures of fiction and fantasy are intimately connected to the material and social realm. Steele confesses her impulse to tell her own story and relinquish the role of the biographer, as she remarks that ‘I mean, some time or other, to write my own history; which has been full of adventures, though not of amours, and will entertain the public greatly’ (III, 182). However, this history is never written. Instead, Steele rejects the Romantic myth of individualised self-expression in favour of co-authorship and attaches her history of adventures to a broader narrative of female friendship. Her text is premised on a desire for social connection, enlisting a sympathetic readership in defence of this precarious ideal of female autonomy and reading this shared life history in terms of collective female experience. The image of the cross-dressed Mrs Steele, fighting to defend her sex, is therefore a powerful symbol of the *Memoirs*. For despite the work’s dependence on sexual and literary commerce, it remains an imaginative space that makes room for difference and identification and combines heroic individualism with female solidarity.

Mary Robinson (1758-1800) 'Written by Herself': The Sentimental Heroine and the 'Aristocracy of Genius'

In her *Memoirs*, Elizabeth Steele engages in cross-gendered identifications with fictional figures, configures her personal history as a social commentary, and fuses the satirical forms of an earlier era with a contemporary discourse of sensibility. However, despite her ability to imagine herself as the heroine of her text, Steele's self-representation is complicated by her fraught relationship to the 'literary' (both as a cultural mode and a commercial practice). In her *Memoirs* (1801), the writer, actress, and courtesan Mary Robinson shares Steele's propensity to fashion a composite identity through the use of pseudonyms, characters, and costume changes. However, in her attempts to recover her public reputation, following her incarnation as courtesan to the Prince of Wales in 1780, Robinson rejects the role of the cross-dressed picaresque adventurer in favour of a feminised self-portrait. She casts herself as the sentimental heroine, solitary wanderer, and dutiful mother and convenes a sympathetic audience around this image of virtue in distress. However, at the same time, the *Memoirs* allows tantalising glimpses of Robinson as the erotically fascinating public icon 'Perdita', dressed in her spectacular costumes and engaged in a royal romance. Robinson attempts to authorise herself in her *Memoirs* as the professional woman writer and the poet of the *Lyrical Tales*.⁶⁴ She also identifies with aristocratic women in the public realm, such as Marie-Antoinette and the Duchess of Devonshire. At times, imagining herself as a woman of acute sensibility, artistic genius, and iconic status reinforces Robinson's sense of singularity, as she attributes her experience to character and circumstance rather than social, economic, or political conditions. However, elsewhere Robinson explores how gender ideologies shape the course of her life and attempts to fashion a female narrative of social progress, financial independence, and artistic development. Robinson's life story reveals that sexual reputation proved a barrier to artistic and social solidarities between eighteenth-century women. Her ideal of an 'aristocracy of genius' and literary sisterhood, which she explores in a range of literary works, therefore remains a textual fantasy rather than a social reality. Nevertheless, by writing the *Memoirs* she

⁶⁴ Linda H. Peterson, 'Becoming an Author: Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* and the Origins of the Woman Artist's Autobiography', in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 36-50.

articulates her desire for public sympathy and artistic reputation, substituting posthumous entry into a circle of female readers and literary women for her present isolation.

'Written by herself'

Mary Robinson's engagement with her celebrated public image and her appropriation of performative strategies of self-representation has been the focus of much recent critical analysis. However, commentators disagree whether Robinson's capacity for protean self-fashioning represents a debilitating response to external pressures or a liberating exploitation of her notorious past. Eleanor Ty argues that Robinson struggles to establish herself as a subject, since she is 'framed by the male gaze' and 'constrained discursively by social definitions of her identity'.⁶⁵ Anne Mellor and Tim Fulford echo this interpretation, at least in part.⁶⁶ However, in contrast, Judith Pascoe, Anne Janowitz, and Claire Brock suggest that Robinson's capacity for self-transformation allows her to exploit and recuperate her notorious public image and rescue a stable self from the status of commodity. Judith Pascoe presents Robinson as the 'spectacular flâneuse' and 'pseudonymous poet' of the urban landscape and the literary marketplace.⁶⁷ Anne Janowitz argues that Robinson's sense of the cultural zeitgeist enables her to make herself 'into a series of living tableaux of the spirit of the age' and Claire Brock demonstrates Robinson's adept manipulation of the mechanics of eighteenth-century fame.⁶⁸ Most recently, in her discussion of the influence of Robinson's acting career on her literary identity, Elizabeth Eger argues that Robinson enacted 'a series of literary, political and cultural transformations that combined intellect, spectacle and authority in a dazzling array of styles and voices'.⁶⁹ My

⁶⁵ Eleanor Ty, 'Engendering A Female Subject: Mary Robinson's (Re) Presentations of the Self', *English Studies in Canada*, 21 (1995), 407-31 (p. 410).

⁶⁶ Anne K. Mellor, 'Mary Robinson and the Scripts of Female Sexuality', in *Representations of the Self from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. by Patrick Coleman, Jayne Lewis, and Jill Kowalik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 230-59 (p. 256); and Tim Fulford, 'The Electrifying Mrs Robinson', *Women's Writing*, 9 (2002), 23-35 (pp. 30-34).

⁶⁷ Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁶⁸ Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), p. 105; and Claire Brock, "'Then Smile and Know Thyself Supremely Great": Mary Robinson and the "Splendour of a Name"', *Women's Writing*, 9 (2002), 107-24.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Eger, 'Spectacle, Intellect and Authority: The Actress in the Eighteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, ed. by Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 33-51 (p. 41).

discussion draws on Linda Peterson's analysis of Robinson's attempts to 'participate in Romantic myths of authorship' and establish a connection between her literary and maternal identities.⁷⁰ But developing Peterson's discussion, I relate Robinson's self-presentation in the *Memoirs* to her autobiographical performances in a range of literary modes. In addition, I explore Robinson's attempts to connect her identity as a youthful associate of the Foxite Whigs to her later incarnation within a radical literary intelligentsia.

Robinson's awareness of the complexities of the relationship between an author and her community of readers is encapsulated in the 'Sylphid Essays', that were published with the *Memoirs* as part of a four-volume set in 1801. The essays provide a commentary on Robinson's rhetorical practices and authorial identity in the *Memoirs*. She writes as 'one of those Aerial Beings', claiming:⁷¹

I have witnessed scenes, and explored characters, at once so specious, and so destructive, that I was almost disposed to question my own existence. But in order to vent the sorrows of my full breast, and to convince you, that though I bear a supernatural form, my feeling and affections are human, I shall endeavour to paint the miseries I have contemplated. (III, 17)

The 'Sylphid' fuses sensibility with social observation and transforms displacement and detachment into a set of moral and aesthetic values. But this authorial identity is premised on a sympathetic exchange between reader and writer, rather than an engagement with social scenes or public characters. Robinson therefore seems to suggest that the social realm poses a potential threat to personal integrity and self-consciousness.

'Marked by the progressive evils of a too acute sensibility'

In the *Memoirs*, Robinson establishes herself as a sentimental heroine and writes the history of how she came to be the poet that she is in a simultaneous process of self-fictionalisation and literary self-fashioning. The text presents her as the victim of 'her genius, her sensibility, and her beauty' (II, 167), as her daughter and editor Maria

⁷⁰ Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 29-34; and Peterson, 'Becoming an Author', p. 36.

⁷¹ Mary Robinson, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson, Written by Herself with Some Posthumous Pieces*, ed. by M. E. Robinson, 4 vols (London: R. Phillips, 1801), III, 3. In this section, further references to the *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson* are given after quotations in the text.

Elizabeth expresses it. The reader is invited to enter into a 'moral code of literary chivalry' in an intimate self-portrait that contrasts with Elizabeth Steele's gossipy and sociable *Memoirs*.⁷² Writing of her early life, Robinson confesses:

The early propensities of my life were tinged with romantic and singular characteristics; some of which I shall here mention, as proofs that the mind is never to be diverted from its original bent; and that every event of my life has more or less been marked by the progressive evils of a too acute sensibility. (I, 11-12)

Sensibility is an ambiguous term in the *Memoirs*. It is the cause of Robinson's past misfortunes and her lifelong sense of dislocation, yet it is also the source of her poetic identity and her literary authority. As the woman of sensibility, Robinson draws on a culturally potent image of femininity. However, she also risks identification as a sexualised object of voyeuristic pleasure or as a passive ideal of virtue in distress. However, by defining sensibility as a form of spirituality and artistic inspiration, Robinson redeems a potentially problematic discourse as she recuperates her own personal and literary legacy. Robinson's insistence on her 'acute sensibility' allows her to establish a continuity between her past and present identities rather than dividing her life into a prelapsarian period of innocence and a subsequent fall into sexual corruption. However, emphasising her 'romantic and singular characteristics' also means that her experiences are understood as a consequence of her own nature rather than her social condition.

Robinson's self-fictionalisation as a romantic heroine is at its most acute in her engagements with the figure of 'Perdita', an epithet that denoted both her personal love affair with the Prince of Wales and her public roles as an actress and courtesan. In her narrative of her liaison with the Prince, Robinson imagines herself as the heroine of a royal romance. She foregrounds feeling hearts and private sorrows, over the drama played out on the public stage, and replaces the sexualised narrative with a romantic self-representation. Events are set in a 'romantic spot' near Kew Palace and include 'midnight perambulations', moonlight serenades, and a correspondence in which the Prince's 'exquisite sensibility' 'breathed through every line' (II, 60-63). Robinson also configures the romance in domestic terms, as she claims 'how would my soul have idolized such a *husband!*' (II, 64). The romance's decline is attributed to

⁷² Swindells, p. 142.

accidents of birth, court conspiracy, and dictatorial parents (rather than the Prince of Wales's inconstant affections).⁷³ Robinson maintains the myth of the 'starcrossed lovers' inhabiting a hostile world and disassociates herself from the avaricious image of the courtesan.⁷⁴ She claims that 'the idea of interest had never entered my mind: secure in the possession of his heart, I had in that delightful certainty counted all my future treasure' (II, 70-71). However, Robinson's blend of commercial and affective terms anticipates the relationship's conclusion, as in 1781 the affair ended and she received five thousand pounds in compensation.⁷⁵

In contrast to Elizabeth Steele's attack on sexual inequality and aristocratic hypocrisy, Robinson consigns her criticisms of the Prince's conduct to her private correspondence. In a letter to John Taylor in 1794, she articulates her position in a language of resentment that is absent from the royal romance of the *Memoirs*:

Have I not reason to be disgusted when I see him, to whom I ought to look for better fortune, lavishing favours on unworthy objects, gratifying the *avarice* of *ignorance* and *dullness*; while I, who sacrificed reputation, an advantageous profession, friends, patronage, the brilliant hours of youth, and the conscious delight of correct conduct, am condemned to the scanty pittance bestowed on every indifferent page who holds up his ermined train of ceremony!⁷⁶

In her polemical work *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), Robinson's personal experience of social injustice is the source of a feminist critique. However, in the *Memoirs*, the sentimental heroine overwhelms the feminist commentator and Robinson assimilates herself into a romanticised role. Nevertheless, by becoming the author of this account, Robinson reclaims ownership of her former self, past history, and public legacy. For the '*dart-dealing* actress' who sought 'to *basilisk* a certain heir apparent' (to take the terms of the *Morning Post*) is repositioned as the innocent lover and victim of royal seduction.⁷⁷

⁷³ For alternative accounts of the end of the relationship, see Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Life of Mary Robinson* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 144; and *Georgiana: Extracts from the Correspondence of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, ed. by Earl of Bessborough (London: John Murray, 1955), p. 291.

⁷⁴ Mellor, p. 244.

⁷⁵ For an analysis of Robinson's financial transactions with the Prince of Wales, see Byrne, pp. 167 and 230.

⁷⁶ Mary Robinson, letter to John Taylor, 5 October 1794, in *Catalogue of the Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents Formed Between 1865 and 1882 by Alfred Morrison*, 6 vols (London: Strangeways and Sons, 1883-92), V, 287.

⁷⁷ *Morning Post*, 12 February 1780.

Robinson's conception of her role as a writer as a pre-determined vocation provides a framework for structuring the experiences of her early life. It also offers an alternative to a narrative of sexual conversion that recalls a past moment of innocence from a 'corrupt' present. The *Memoirs* draws on the genres of spiritual autobiography, sentimental fiction, and Gothic melodrama rather than the scandalous memoir. Robinson recalls her birth on a 'tempestuous night' (I, 4) and presents her childhood as a time of 'cloistered solitude' (I, 3). She locates herself in an environment of dark staircases and Gothic arches that are 'calculated to inspire the soul with mournful meditation' (I, 3). The tropes of gloom, storm, and solitude establish a continuity between past and present, as Robinson claims that 'through life the tempest has followed my footsteps' (I, 4). As a child, she pictures herself listening to the 'chaunting' of the choristers in her isolated nursery:

I can at this moment recall to memory the sensations I then experienced; the tones that seemed to thrill through my heart, the longing which I felt to unite my feeble voice to the full anthem, and the awful though sublime impression which the church service never failed to make upon my feelings. (I, 12-13)

Robinson revels in her recollection of a transcendent aesthetic experience, yet she also reveals a desire to belong to a linguistic community. In her *Memoirs*, she notes her childhood predilection for sitting beneath 'the book from which the clergyman read the lessons' and learning 'epitaphs and monumental inscriptions' (I, 13-14) in the churchyard. However, the *Memoirs* ultimately expresses Robinson's aspiration for inclusion within a literary tradition rather than a spiritual fellowship, as her childhood propensity to repeat the works of Pope and Mason suggests.

In a secular corollary to the spiritual conversion narratives of Quaker and Methodist women writers, Robinson's *Memoirs* interprets the accidents of character and circumstance as 'providential' signposts on the way to artistic development. In her analysis of her childhood, she suggests that her father's financial ruin and conjugal infidelity mark her with an 'air of dejection' (I, 39) that reinforces her natural propensity for melancholy. Her education is presented as a series of disappointments that nonetheless reveal her passion and suitability for an artistic life. The high point is her experience at the Chelsea school of Meribah Lorrington in 1768, where she is no longer the silent listener in the nursery longing to join her voice with the singing multitude but a poet encouraged in her literary endeavours. Robinson identifies with

Lorrington as a female intellectual, noting ‘all that I ever learned I acquired from this extraordinary woman’ (I, 33). However, it is a troubled correspondence, since Robinson acknowledges Lorrington’s ‘unfeminine propensity’ (I, 33) for alcoholism and presents her as the victim of a ‘premature decay’ (I, 42).

Robinson’s fleeting and problematic identification with an ‘extraordinary’ female figure is consistent with her claim in the *Memoirs* that she is exiled from her sex by sensibility, genius, and, above all, sexual reputation. Robinson suggests that during the first years of her marriage she attempts to maintain the ‘most rigid domestic propriety’ and her ‘name unsullied’. However, she claims that she is still unwelcome in respectable female company as a consequence of her husband’s propensity to admit women whose ‘low licentious lives’ rendered them ‘the shame and outcasts of society’ (I, 174-75). This insight into the ways in which sexual reputation divided women from one another across the social spectrum is reinforced in her claim that:

From that hour I have never felt the affection for my own sex which perhaps some women feel: I have never taught my heart to cherish their friendship, or to depend on their attentions beyond the short perspective of a prosperous day. Indeed I have almost uniformly found my own sex my most inveterate enemies; I have experienced little kindness from them; though my bosom has often ached with the pang inflicted by their envy, slander, and malevolence. (I, 176)

Robinson is unrecognisable as the author of *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799) in this insistence on her segregation from ‘my own sex’. However, she retains the frailest hope that ‘perhaps some women feel’ an affection she does not share and intimates her desire for protection from a female reader who, paradoxically, might defend her from the collective hostility of her sex.

Robinson’s self-portrait in the *Memoirs* lacks the rhetorical force of *A Letter to the Women of England*, but it is still concerned with the ways in which gender shapes women’s lives. In her reflections on her personal history, Robinson elucidates the potential barriers to women’s social advancement and self-development and presents her female readers with an alternative to romantic fulfilment. Artistic ambition and financial independence become a secular alternative to a spiritual pilgrimage, evident in the *Memoirs*’ conclusion that ‘the consciousness of independence is the only true felicity in this world of humiliations’ (II, 18). Marriage is presented as the ultimate

obstruction to women's professional aspirations. For despite an 'extraordinary genius for dramatic exhibitions' (I, 47), cultivated by a period of training with David Garrick, Robinson's ambitions as an actress are temporarily curtailed by the arrival of Thomas Robinson. This opposition is reinforced by Robinson's claim that 'even while I was pronouncing the marriage vow my fancy involuntarily wandered to that scene where I had hoped to support myself with *eclat* and reputation' (I, 69). There are inconsistencies in her self-presentation as the aspiring actress dressed in both the 'habit of a child' (I, 68) and 'the habit of a quaker' (I, 70).⁷⁸ However, this deployment of the motifs of spiritual and sexual conversion also enables an ironic commentary on marriage, as she suggests that this union with Thomas Robinson (rather than her later liaison with the Prince) was the true moment of her 'fall'.

Robinson's *Memoirs* therefore suggests that the private role of wife to a profligate and neglectful husband is a fatal alternative to the independent professionalism of acting. Reputation might be gained on stage, but seemingly it is lost in marriage. When Robinson finally embarks on her acting career in 1776, she suggests 'it was now that I began to know the perils attendant on a dramatic life' (II, 15). She recalls that she received numerous 'proposals of a libertine nature by a *royal* Duke, a *lofty* Marquis, and a City Merchant of considerable fortune, conveyed through the medium of milliners, mantua-makers, &c. &c.' (II, 30). However, Robinson resists inscription within the cliché, signalled in the linguistic collapse into '&c., &c.'. Instead, she claims that her reputation was secured by the 'highest female patronage, a circle of the most respectable and partial friends' (II, 15). In the portrayal of her professional career, Robinson foregrounds female patronage over libertine protection, resists public configuration as a virtuous victim of theatrical seductions, and seeks to establish herself within a circle of female achievement.

'The mixed confusion of a study and a nursery'

In the *Memoirs*, Robinson articulates a professional identity grounded in literary labour that is also continuous with her maternal and romantic self-image. Robinson seems to construct the public and private realms in opposition, presenting herself at

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the ambivalent connotations of the Quaker costume during this period, see, Marcia Pointon, 'Quakerism and Visual Culture 1650-1800', *Art History*, 20 (1997), 397-431 (pp. 411-12).

Ranelagh with 'little relish for public amusements, and a heart throbbing with domestic solicitude' (I, 160). However, while she deploys maternity as an antidote to her dangerous association with sexuality, she is never reduced to the 'static vignettes of innocent motherhood' of the Magdalen House.⁷⁹ Instead, she imagines maternity as a source of artistic creativity and a motivation for her literary labours.⁸⁰ At times, the *Memoirs* observes its own strategies of self-representation, evident in Robinson's account of a surprise visit by George Fitzgerald:

My mourning dress was more calculated to display maternal assiduity than elegant and tasteful dishabille. In a small basket near my chair slept my little Maria; my table was spread with papers; and every thing around me presented the mixed confusion of a study and a nursery. (I, 162)

Robinson reveals a self-conscious regard for her own performance, combining expressions of maternal sensibility with theatrical vocabulary and signalling her intention to seduce her reader by offering a voyeuristic glimpse of a private image. This tendency is consistent with Elizabeth Eger's argument that Robinson was unable or reluctant 'to distinguish between life and performance in fashioning her own identity'.⁸¹ However, this intermingling of professional labour and domestic duties also attempts to expand the portrait of the Romantic artist, as Linda Peterson suggests.⁸² Robinson develops this attempt to 'capitalise the "mother"', to take Janet Todd's phrase, in the account of her imprisonment in the Fleet in 1775.⁸³ Robinson recreates the night her daughter uttered her first words of "'all gone!'" while 'watching every cloud that passed over the moon' (I, 169-70). She identifies with the feminised moon that is misjudged as inconstant, noting that 'indeed the world has mistaken the character of my mind; I have ever been the reverse of volatile and dissipated' (I, 78-79). In the process, she disassociates herself from the only other source of light in the prison, the courtesan Angelina Albanesi who 'shone as a brilliant constellation' (I, 177). She therefore signals her rejection of present public fame in favour of motherhood and a posthumous poetic reputation.

⁷⁹ Vivien Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 61.

⁸⁰ Peterson, 'Becoming an Author', pp. 43-44.

⁸¹ Eger, 'Spectacle, Intellect and Authority', p. 39.

⁸² Peterson, 'Becoming an Author', pp. 43-44.

⁸³ Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, p. 210.

Robinson may have found a precedent for her efforts to connect her roles as a mother and an artist in the actress Sarah Siddons, who created a public persona from 'a dramatic version' of her private self.⁸⁴ However, in her self-portrayal as a tragic heroine and maternal ideal, Robinson also drew on Mary Wollstonecraft's self-representation as the Romantic artist, abandoned lover, solitary wanderer, and loving mother in *A Short Residence* (1796). In an extended poetic meditation on the Welsh landscape, which appears in the middle of her account of her pregnancy, Robinson fuses her public image as Perdita (the 'lost one') with her literary identity as a Romantic poet:

Here I enjoyed the sweet repose of solitude: here I wandered about woods entangled by the wild luxuriance of nature, or roved upon the mountain's side, while the blue vapours floated round its summit. [...] How often have I set at my little parlour window and watched the pale moonbeams darting amidst the sombre and venerable yew trees that shed their solemn shade over the little garden. How often have I strolled down the woody paths, spangled with the dew of morning, and shaken off the briery branches that hung about me. How tranquil did I feel escaped from kindred tyranny, and how little did I regret the busy scenes of fashionable folly. Unquestionably the Creator formed me with a strong propensity to adore the sublime and beautiful of his works! (I, 141-42)

The solitary wanderer is able to appreciate both the masculine sublime of the mountain's summit and the feminine beauty of the 'pale moonbeams'. She locates herself within an idealised landscape that excludes the material reality of the nearby flannel manufactory and the Methodist seminary. This literary self-portrait unites past and present, signalled by the movement from 'here' to 'how often have I'. She revives the blend of aesthetic and religious discourse that dominates the account of her childhood and projects forward to her persona as the Romantic artist that was memorialised by Joshua Reynolds in his portrait of 1783 (reproduced below). The mournful image of the woman writer sitting 'at my little parlour window' is an evocative poetic symbol for Robinson that replaces the other woman at the window, the prostitute, who threatens her legacy. This passage suggests the potential for solipsism inherent in the culture of sensibility. However, in the *Lyrical Tales* (1800) Robinson transforms the solitary wanderer into the ideal social commentator. In the process, she participates in the eighteenth-century re-evaluation of 'the privacy of

⁸⁴ Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, pp. 13 and 15-16.



Figure 1: Joshua Reynolds, *Mary Robinson* (1783)

retreat' from a 'passive privation to that of an active agency, the negative liberty of a chosen solitude', as Michael McKeon expresses it.⁸⁵

In this self-portrait, Robinson demonstrates her capacity to attach herself to the literary zeitgeist. She locates herself within domestic spaces and rural landscapes and rejects the satirical mode that by the turn of the century was understood as a form of literary cross-dressing. However, the *Memoirs* is a text of light and shade, natural vistas and social scenes, romantic solitude and fashionable sociability, labour and leisure, in which Robinson acknowledges her identity as a poet of the urban as well as the rural sublime. In her breathless recollection of her release from the Fleet prison after fifteen months, she notes:

The first moments of emancipation were delightful to the senses. I felt as though I had been newly born; I longed to see all my old and intimate associates, and almost forgot that they had so unworthily neglected me. Every thing that had passed now appeared like a melancholy vision. The gloom had dissolved, and a new perspective seemed to brighten before me. The first place of public entertainment I went to was Vauxhall [...] the sensation which I felt on hearing the music and beholding the gay throng, during this first visit in public, after so long a seclusion, was undescribable. (I, 182-83)

This re-entry into the fashionable world is a moment of self-renewal that exceeds expression, comparable to the immersion in natural beauty she experienced in Trevecca or the religious sublime of her childhood. In the tolerant textual space of the *Memoirs*, the woman of fashion, who mingles in the 'gay throng' (I, 95), coexists with the solitary wanderer, romantic heroine, and virtuous mother, who inhabits the 'mixed confusion of a study and a nursery' (I, 162).

Anne Mellor and Linda Peterson argue that Robinson's multifaceted literary identity is compromised by Maria Elizabeth's postscript to the *Memoirs*, which allows the image of the mother to overwhelm the portrait of the artist.⁸⁶ However, in the 'Continuation', Robinson is depicted 'watching over the health of her suffering child' while producing 'poetic effusions', 'contemplating the ocean', and meditating on 'the scenes of her former life' (II, 115-16). This portrait seems to allow all aspects of Robinson's poetic persona, created in the early part of the *Memoirs*, to remain in view. Admittedly, as Mellor notes, Maria Elizabeth relegates Robinson's sixteen-year

⁸⁵ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 414.

⁸⁶ Mellor, pp. 250-51; and Peterson, *Victorian Women's Autobiography*, pp. 33-34.

relationship with the veteran of the American Revolutionary wars Banastre Tarleton to a footnote.⁸⁷ But nonetheless, she juxtaposes her family portrait of poetic motherhood with a transcription of the 'Lines to Him Who Will Understand Them', a poem written in 1788 that foregrounds Robinson's public image as the romantic heroine abandoned by her lover. The poem's speaker stridently asserts her self-renewal through poetry and suggests that the life of the mind compensates for emotional losses, as she notes that 'Sweet Poetry shall soothe my soul; / Philosophy each pang controul' (II, 119). Robinson transforms private sorrows into literary production and commercial gain, and establishes the continuity between her personal circumstances and her professional identity, as the romantic heroine speaks with the voice of the Romantic poet.

The greatest challenge to Robinson's poetic identity presented in the *Memoirs* is not Maria Elizabeth's domesticated portrait, but the feelings of despair articulated in her own voice. She establishes literature as a means of financial independence and an expression of family ties, but the romanticised image of authorship is undermined by her reflections on the costs of a literary life. Recalling her first efforts to retain a 'decent independence' through 'literary labour' in the 1770s, she notes:

Alas! how little did I then know either the fatigue or the hazard of mental occupations! How little did I foresee that the day would come, when my health would be impaired, my thoughts perpetually employed, in so destructive a pursuit! At the moment that I write this page I feel in every fibre of my brain the fatal conviction that it is a *destroying labour*. (I, 185)

In this evocative characterisation, writing becomes a form of mental and physical enervation and Robinson seems engaged in a self-destructive act. Rather than the casualty of the sexual or literary marketplace, she becomes the victim of her text. She poignantly expresses the experience of the professional writer subject to the constraints of perpetual production. In the *Memoirs*, Robinson's impulse towards professional fulfilment and literary aspiration coexists with a drive towards melancholy and self-destruction, in a text that is as much a eulogy as an autobiography. The dying author enters into her work, remarking that 'probably these pages will be read, when the hand that writes them moulders in the grave' (I, 121). In contrast to the image of 'destroying labour', the 'mouldering hand' holds out the

⁸⁷ Mellor, p. 250.

possibility for a future connection. However, these images also suggest the difficulties of forging a narrative of artistic development or realising a literary community in the present. The posthumous union with an imagined readership must provide a substitute for an artistic fraternity in the social realm.

'The very highest ranks of literature'

In addition to her identification with the literary figure of the sentimental heroine, Robinson aligns herself with iconic women in the public realm such as Marie-Antoinette and the Duchess of Devonshire. These associations across class boundaries allow Robinson to imagine continuities between her past incarnation as a woman of fashion and her present persona as a Romantic writer. In addition, exploring her relationship to these women on the basis of sensibility, maternity, social performance, and literary talent allows her to rethink the relationship between poet, patron, and artistic networks. This attachment to high status and celebrated female figures potentially reinforces her sense of exceptionality. However, by restoring a private selfhood to these public icons, Robinson re-inscribes 'extraordinary' women within collective narratives of female experience. Robinson also qualifies her self-definition as the solitary Romantic in her aspiration to be part of the 'aristocracy of genius', a desire she continues to articulate in her correspondence, essays, and letters from the final years of her life.⁸⁸

Judith Pascoe and Adriana Craciun present fascinating insights into Robinson's textual interactions with Marie-Antoinette. Pascoe argues that the French Queen provided Robinson with an example of both 'maternal martyrdom' and 'performative power', while Craciun suggests that she enabled her to fashion a 'mixture of aristocratic and bourgeois politics (and poetics)'.⁸⁹ In 'Marie Antoinette's Lamentation' of 1793, Robinson presents a sentimental and maternal portrait of the Queen.⁹⁰ In the *Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France*, published in the same year, the speaker grieves 'That RANK should be a CRIME, and GENIUS hurl'd

⁸⁸ Mary Robinson, 'Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England', *Monthly Magazine; or, British Register*, 1 October 1800, p. 220.

⁸⁹ Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, p. 99; and Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 89.

⁹⁰ Mary Robinson, *Poems: A New Edition* (London: J. Evans, [1793?]), pp. 89-92.

/ A mournful wand'rer on the pitying world!', evoking Robinson's poetic self-portrait in 'Lines to Him Who Will Understand Them'.⁹¹ However, in the *Memoirs*, Robinson stresses her connection to the Queen as a fellow social performer rather than a dutiful mother or a romantic heroine. This difference in approach is evident in a passage in the 'Continuation' that recalls a visual exchange which took place between Marie-Antoinette and Robinson at a public dinner at Versailles:

She appeared to survey, with peculiar attention, a miniature of the Prince of Wales, which Mrs Robinson wore on her bosom, and of which, on the ensuing day, she commissioned the Duke of Orleans to request the loan. Perceiving Mrs Robinson gaze with admiration on her white and polished arms, as she drew on her gloves, the Queen again uncovered them, and leaned for a few moments on her hand. The Duke, on returning the picture, gave to the fair owner a purse, netted by the hand of Antoinette, and which she had commissioned him to present, from her, to *la belle Anglaise*. Mrs Robinson not long after these events quitted Paris, and returned to her native country. (II, 94-95)

This stylised account reworks the theatrical encounter of 'Florizel' and 'Perdita' in a comparable series of visual exchanges, hand gestures, and gift giving. However, in a revision of the past, *la belle Anglaise* is not simply the object of the royal gaze. Instead, by her own looking and for her own pleasure she induces the Queen to remove her gloves. The Prince is reduced to a miniature traded between women, after the Queen looks lingeringly at Robinson's bosom, and the netted purse provides compensation for the unbalanced exchange between Robinson and the Prince. The Queen restores to Robinson her public identity as a successful social performer, allowing her to return to her native country with her sense of self intact.⁹²

Many commentators note Robinson's identification with Marie-Antoinette as a martyred mother, maligned public figure, and social actress. However, her relationship with her literary patron and fellow Foxite politician Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire has been the subject of far less critical attention. Robinson and Georgiana came into contact in the spheres of literature, politics, fashion, and sexual intrigue. Their ambiguous relationship as patronising Duchess and patronised poet, described as 'an interchange of subordination and emulation' by Anne Janowitz, was

⁹¹ Mary Robinson, *Monody to the Memory of the Late Queen of France* (London: J. Evans, 1793), p. 23.

⁹² Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, pp. 117-24.

compounded by their frequent encounters in the press.⁹³ In an article discussing the introduction of Marie-Antoinette's *chemise de la Reine* to England, which appeared in the *Morning Herald* in 1782, the Duchess and Robinson were configured as leaders of 'the Ladies of *ton*' and the 'Paphian corps' respectively.⁹⁴ This analogy was replicated in the political realm, as in the press reports and satirical prints generated by the Westminster Election in March 1784 Robinson and the Duchess were aligned in their support for Charles James Fox. Elaine Chalus's work highlights the role of aristocratic women in electoral politics.⁹⁵ However, as Amanda Foreman demonstrates, when the Duchess of Devonshire canvassed on behalf of a man outside of her family (moving freely through all sections of society and capitalising on her public reputation) she provoked heated criticism in the government press.⁹⁶ In the newspapers, the Duchess was incorporated within the 'Bevy of Beauties' as a prostitute who 'transacts business in a very *expeditious* manner, and therefore deserves much praise from her *favourite member*'.⁹⁷ This sexualised portrayal enabled Robinson to align herself with Georgiana as a fellow victim of the press rather than drawing on their momentary shared status as 'women of the people'.⁹⁸

In the *Memoirs*, Robinson relocates this public relationship to the private sphere. She imagines a correspondence between herself and the Duchess on the basis of poetry, maternity, and sensibility rather than fashion, sex, and politics. Robinson recalls that she first met the Duchess as an aspiring poet, when she sent a volume of her verse as an envoy from the Fleet prison to Devonshire House. Robinson designates the text 'my first literary offering at the shrine of nobility' (I, 171). In the account of their subsequent meeting, the Duchess's celebrated beauty is reconfigured as evidence of her moral worth. Robinson notes that 'mildness and sensibility beamed in her eyes, and irradiated her countenance', while the woman writer appears in a 'plain brown satin gown' (I, 172-73). Robinson rewrites the public paradigm of their engagement

⁹³ Janowitz, p. 39.

⁹⁴ *Morning Herald*, 21 November 1782.

⁹⁵ Elaine Chalus, "'That Epidemical Madness': Women and Electoral Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century", in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (see McCreery, above), pp. 151-78.

⁹⁶ Amanda Foreman, 'A Politician's Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig Party', in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (see McCreery, above), pp. 179-204 (pp. 185-87).

⁹⁷ *History of the Westminster Election, Containing Every Material Occurrence, from its Commencement on the First of April, to the Final Close of the Poll* (London: J. Debrett, 1784), pp. 248-49.

⁹⁸ *Westminster*, p. 248.

as rival *fashionistas* and instead stresses their inner worth, manifested in the simplicity of their dress and revealed by the legible body. This emphasis on interiority is characteristic of Robinson's previous portraits of the Duchess, such as her 'Sonnet Inscribed to Her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire' (1791). In the poem, Robinson deliberately dismisses a discussion of the Duchess's beauty in favour of a portrayal of 'the rare wonders of thy polish'd MIND':

The GEM, that in thy SPOTLESS BREAST enshrin'd,
Glow with the light of intellectual ray;
Shall, like the Brilliant, scorn each borrow'd aid,
And deck'd with native lustre NEVER FADE!⁹⁹

Robinson replicates this strategy two years later in her self-presentation in 'Stanzas to a Friend, Who Desired to Have My Portrait', as she refuses to dwell on her own physicality or 'senseless frame' and offers instead 'The PICTURE OF MY MIND!'.¹⁰⁰ In the *Memoirs*, this poetic encounter is complemented by a sentimental exchange between mothers, as Robinson comments:

I made frequent visits to the amiable Duchess, and was at all times received with the warmest proofs of friendship. My little girl, to whom I was still a nurse, generally accompanied me, and always experienced the kindest caresses from my admired patroness, my liberal and affectionate friend. Frequently the Duchess inquired most minutely into the story of my sorrows, and as often gave me tears of the most spontaneous sympathy. (I, 173-74)

The characterisation of Georgiana as 'my admired patroness, my liberal and affectionate friend' is a simultaneous assertion of equality and dependence. The sentimental tableau is also highly ambivalent, since Robinson is both the penitent prostitute of a sentimental novel (rehearsing her tale in exchange for charity) and the woman writer (deploying her tragic personal history to petition for support). However, in her role as aristocratic patron and sympathetic respondent, Georgiana becomes the ideal reader of the *Memoirs* (this 'story of my sorrows').

Georgiana plays a crucial role in Robinson's attempts to integrate her present persona as a woman writer, embedded within a literary intelligentsia, with her past incarnation as a woman of fashion, precariously placed within an aristocratic milieu. In her novel *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Robinson stages an encounter between the thinly disguised fictional figures of the Duchess of Chatsworth (named after the

⁹⁹ Mary Robinson, *Poems* (London: J. Bell, 1791), p. 172.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, *Poems: A New Edition*, pp. 221-22.

Devonshires' Derbyshire country estate) and Martha Morley (an actress and writer, struggling for financial independence following abandonment by her husband). In a fictional reworking of the meeting in the *Memoirs*, the Duchess of Chatsworth visits Martha Morley in her hotel:

Mrs. Morley approached her, not with the mean obsequious bend of servile adulation; but if she inclined her form as the duchess put forth her hand to raise her, it was because she felt that species of adoration which warms the Persian's bosom, when he beholds the rising-sun, the source of all his zeal and all his blessings.¹⁰¹

The conditional 'if she inclined her form' keeps alive the possibility that she did not, while the excess of the imagery and the complexity of the syntax suggests the difficulty of articulating a relationship based on both parity and patronage. However, the title of the novel also evokes Georgiana's notorious status as the mother of a 'natural daughter', implicitly connecting Robinson and the Duchess as women of doubtful reputation.¹⁰² In the image of Martha Morley observing the 'passing throngs' and delivering a social critique from her window, Robinson appears at her most autobiographical.¹⁰³ She overwrites the sign of the prostitute with the figure of the woman writer and reflects on sexual double standards and social hypocrisy:

Often did the smile of contempt involuntarily pass over her lip, when she interpreted the significant looks of those who calculate the mind's value by the outward decorations of life; often did she pity the low scorn of unenlightened natures, when, born to that rank which they dishonoured, women of equivocal virtue considered themselves as Mrs. Morley's superiors; while in reality they were as far below her in the scale of intellect, as they were more elevated on the revolving wheel of fortune.¹⁰⁴

This overlay of social status, sexual reputation, and intellectual capacity is recurrent in a novel that laments that 'the aristocracy of wealth had little to do with the aristocracy of genius'.¹⁰⁵ However, Robinson imagines an ideal convergence in which intellectual and social rank are recognised as equivalent. This textual fantasy is encapsulated in the figure of Martha Morley, who joins the aristocratic social circle for dinner dressed in her patron's gowns.

¹⁰¹ Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter*, 2 vols (London: Longman and Rees, 1799), II, 164-65.

¹⁰² The Duchess of Devonshire's 'natural daughter' Eliza Courtney was born in February 1791 and her father was Charles Grey. Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins, 1998; repr. 1999), pp. 267-70.

¹⁰³ Robinson, *Natural Daughter*, II, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Natural Daughter*, II, 64-65.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *Natural Daughter*, I, 251.

Robinson develops this radical equation between aristocratic and literary rank and her conception of art as a fulfilment of social ambition in her essays written in the final years of her life. In 'Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England', published in instalments in 1800 in the *Monthly Magazine*, Robinson imagines a spatial continuity between the poet's garret of her present and the ballrooms of her past. However, she desires that social access might be attained through intellectual merit rather than the sexualised body. The essay begins by attacking aristocratic neglect of talent, lamenting that:

Books present the abstracts of the mind. The author breathes in his works – lives in their spirit, and is immortalized by their reputation. The exalted orders of the community read, approve, admire: the production of the brain is extolled and cherished; but the heart of the writer often is a prey to poverty and sorrow.¹⁰⁶

The beautifully bound book stands in for the author who gives it form, as Robinson acutely observes that her texts can inhabit spaces where her person would not be welcome. However, despite the apparent bleakness of this self-portrait, the essay is ultimately a confident assertion of superiority. She comments that 'the nobility of England, of late years, both male and female, evince their consciousness of the inferiority which is attached to birth, when placed in comparison with talents, by their frequent attempts in the paths of literature'.¹⁰⁷ Robinson's list of aspiring literary aristocrats includes the Duchess of Devonshire, whose poetry of the late 1790s was, according to Paula Byrne, 'heavily influenced' by Robinson's work.¹⁰⁸ Robinson concludes her observations by suggesting that 'though impartial criticism cannot place these productions in the very highest ranks of literature; they still demand the meed of praise, because they are the offspring of an honourable emulation'.¹⁰⁹

However, this 'honourable emulation' worked both ways. Robinson suggests that the woman of rank aspires to the status of the writer, but her own ideal of a coterie of artists is modelled on aristocratic sociability. In a letter to Jane Porter of September 1800, she enthuses:

¹⁰⁶ Robinson, 'Manners', p. 220.

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, 'Manners', p. 219.

¹⁰⁸ Byrne, p. 361.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, 'Manners', p. 219.

Oh! Heavens! if a Select Society could be formed, - a little Colony of Mental [powers], - a world of Talents, drawn into a small but brilliant circle, - what a splendid Sunshine would it display; and how deeply in gloom would it throw all the uninteresting vapid scenery of Human life!¹¹⁰

Robinson's depiction of the 'Select Society' echoes her description of her first visit to the Pantheon when she 'mingled in the brilliant circle' (I, 97). It also evokes Maria Elizabeth's characterisation of Robinson's house in the 1780s as the '*rendezvous* of talents' (II, 86). Robinson's idealised community is based on the democratic values of artistic merit and yet is also envisaged as a social and intellectual elite. This paradox reinforces Adriana Craciun's argument that an 'Aristocracy of Genius' and a 'Republic of Letters' are not incompatible for Robinson.¹¹¹

The *Memoirs* is the culmination of Robinson's assertion of literary autonomy and registers her transformation from dependence on aristocratic patronage to a network of readers. This transition was perhaps enabled by Robinson's membership of the literary circle surrounding William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft from 1796 and her role as a contributor to the *Morning Post* from 1797.¹¹² Robinson charts her personal and literary development in the 'prestructures' of her published texts.¹¹³ The list of subscribers to *Poems* (1791) locates Robinson within a social, political, and literary elite and includes public figures such as the Prince of Wales, Charles James Fox, the Duchess of Devonshire, Joshua Reynolds, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Samuel Jackson Pratt.¹¹⁴ In contrast, on the publication of her first novel *Vancenza; or, The Dangers of Credulity* (1792), Robinson dedicates the third edition 'TO THAT PUBLIC, by which my literary productions have been so warmly received'.¹¹⁵ However, in the preface to her sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), Robinson rejects a poetic identity secured by reader patronage or commercial success and instead associates herself with a literary sisterhood. She pays 'tribute to the talents of

¹¹⁰ Mary Robinson, letter to Jane Porter, 11 September 1800, Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection, New York. Quoted in *Mary Robinson: Selected Poems*, ed. by Judith Pascoe (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), pp. 43-44.

¹¹¹ Craciun, p. 97.

¹¹² Mary Wollstonecraft's letters reveal that she was corresponding with Mary Robinson by the end of 1796. *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 387.

¹¹³ Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Mary Robinson, *Poems* (London: J. Bell, 1791), ix-xxiv.

¹¹⁵ Mary Robinson, *Vancenza; or, The Dangers of Credulity*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: J. Bell, 1792), I, vi-vii.

my illustrious country-women; who, unpatronized by courts, and unprotected by the powerful, persevere in the paths of literature, and ennoble themselves by the unperishable lustre of MENTAL PRE-EMINENCE!'.¹¹⁶

However, in her writing, Robinson's sense of female connection is only ever precarious at best, as her disreputable past proved a barrier to personal and literary association. In 'Present State of the Manners', Robinson reflects on the possibilities of a literary sisterhood, noting 'how powerful might such a phalanx become, were it to act in union of sentiment, and sympathy of feeling; and by a participation of public fame secure, to the end of time, the admiration of posterity'.¹¹⁷ This desire is embodied in *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), which concludes with a 'List of British Female Literary Characters Living in the Eighteenth Century'. The list is arranged in alphabetical order and juxtaposes talented women irrespective of politics, class, or reputation (therefore erasing the divisions that stood between them in life).¹¹⁸ The Margravine of Anspach, a playwright ostracised in England for her colourful private life, sits alongside the ideal of middling-class femininity, Anna Barbauld. The feminist Mary Wollstonecraft rubs shoulders with the Tory Anglican Jane West and, most significantly, 'Mrs Robinson' inhabits the same page as 'Miss Hannah More'. The tragedy of the list is that while it presents the possibility of a literary community it also emphasises the divisiveness of sexual reputation that worked against female artists' sense of themselves as a collective body. Sarah Siddons's letter, written in response to Robinson's gift of a volume of poetry in 1800, exemplifies this difficulty. Siddons declares that she longs for 'the *possibility* of being acquainted' with Robinson, but must 'sacrifice' her inclinations to avoid 'the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill'.¹¹⁹ Seemingly, Robinson does not write *A Letter to the Women of England* under the pseudonym Anne Frances Randall because she wishes to avoid association with Wollstonecraft, but because she is better able to address womankind in the name of a fictitious woman of no reputation.

¹¹⁶ Mary Robinson, *Sappho and Phaon* (London: S. Gosnell, 1796), p. 16.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, 'Manners', p. 220.

¹¹⁸ Anne Frances Randall, *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (London: Longman and Rees, 1799), pp. 99-104.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Siddons, letter to John Taylor, spring 1800. Quoted in Byrne, p. 311.

Robinson's desire to become part of a 'phalanx' of women artists and establish a model of salon sociability complicates her relationship to the normative image of Romantic authorship. At moments, Robinson embraces the persona of the exiled poet, exemplified by her self-representation as the solitary Romantic of the Welsh mountains or the woman at the window contemplating the Brighton seascape. Writing to James Marshall three months before her death in September 1800, she pictures herself as 'a solitary shadow of my former self'. She claims she experiences 'no pleasure, but that of looking back on *past* felicity' and is able to 'welcome Solitude, and "musing melancholy"'.¹²⁰ However, in the *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson transforms 'musing melancholy' into an enduring poetic legacy. In the *Memoirs*, Robinson articulates her identity through a cast of apparently incompatible characters, as the woman of fashion, the sentimental heroine, good mother, and Romantic poet 'mingle in the brilliant circle' of her text. By constructing herself as a figure of acute sensibility and poetic genius exiled within an unfeeling world, she potentially detaches herself from social experience. Yet, in her attempt to examine women's relationship to literary labour, Robinson makes her personal agenda serve a public function rather than simply recounting the melancholy accidents of character and circumstance. Therefore, while Elizabeth Steele's *Memoirs* is haunted by the competing agendas of publisher and ghostwriter and looks to the traditions of the past, Robinson attaches her personal narrative to her cultural moment and invests in a future community of women artists.

**'One Cannot Judge What Is Like One Self':
The Faithful History of Elizabeth Fox (1750-1842)**

For Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson life writing is a means of self-vindication that enables them to exchange a public history for a self-determined narrative. In contrast, in her manuscript *Journal* (1806-1841) Elizabeth Fox attaches her identity to the communal rhythms of daily life and the collective history of her social and

¹²⁰ Mary Robinson, letter to James Marshall, 10 September 1800, Abinger Deposit, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Quoted in Byrne, p. 409.

political milieu.¹²¹ At first glance, Elizabeth Fox was the ultimate self-made woman, as she abandoned her public role as the courtesan 'Mrs Armistead' in 1795 and reinvented herself as the wife of the Whig statesman Charles James Fox. The Journal is crucial to this self-transformation, as she exploits the freedom of the form to evade the 'sins' of her past and constructs an alternative personal history in its cyclical structure. Mrs Fox's relational identity is reminiscent of the communal selves of Methodists Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth rather than the self-authored narratives of Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson. Relinquishing the role of heroine allows her to engage in collective identifications and find consolation for her grief in her widowhood. She imagines herself as the protector of the Foxite legacy and a repository for political memory. However, like the life writing of Fletcher and Tooth, the Journal also reveals the potential consequences of abandoning the role of subject and highlights the pressures of dependence on social networks. Mrs Fox doubts her self-worth, reveals her impulse for self-regulation and social conformity, and shapes her self-expression to ensure the harmony of the group portrait. In the 'private' space of the Journal, she fashions an alternative visual language, articulating feelings of distress through erratic handwriting, blank spaces, and black lines scratched into the paper.¹²² At times, she also seems displaced from the present, expressing her sense of belatedness as the relic of a former era. Reflecting on her portrait by Joshua Reynolds in 1825, Mrs Fox notes, 'they say it is very like I do not see the least likeness but one cannot judge what is like one self.'¹²³ Unlike Steele and Robinson's capacity to orchestrate and admire their own social performances, Mrs Fox refracts her self-image through the gaze of others. She therefore relinquishes self-authorship and narrative authority in order to travel incognito, while her origin or destination remains undisclosed.

¹²¹ 'Mrs Fox's Journal', British Library, Holland House Collection, Additional MS 51476-51507. The Journal is missing for the period 15 April 1813 to 7 May 1814 and 24 August 1828 to 20 April 1829. In the final volume, two different styles of handwriting appear. Mrs Fox may have dictated her remarks to her servant Martha Tucker and her companion Elizabeth Marston.

¹²² Cynthia A. Huff, 'Textual Boundaries: Space in Nineteenth-Century Women's Manuscript Diaries', in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 123-38 (p. 137).

¹²³ 'Mrs Fox's Journal', BL, Holland House, Add MS 51493, 9 November 1825.

'The celebrated demi-rep Mrs A-mst-d' and 'dearest Liz'

Recent critical discussions of the diary stress the genre's ability to present 'a field open for self-creation by self-inscription' and a 'narrative structure of repetition within the cycle of dailiness'.¹²⁴ As a permanent physical record of a cyclical past of the author's own making, the diary was the ideal form for Elizabeth Fox. Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson were highly adept at self-reinvention, but the former 'Mrs A-st-d' of the gossip columns emerged onto the public stage without social origins, personal history, family ties, or even a name of her own.¹²⁵ Writers of scurrilous pamphlets and periodicals enthusiastically filled in the blanks. The *Town and Country Magazine* claimed in 1776 that she was 'in the vulgar phrase' 'born in a cellar'.¹²⁶ But in 1779 the newspaper presented her as 'the daughter of a shoe-maker' turned Methodist preacher, who lived by 'the sale of her charms'.¹²⁷ Mrs Armistead's career seems to have begun in one of the high class brothels of St James's and lasted from the early 1770s until 1783.¹²⁸ During this time she was nominated the '*High Priestess of Patriotism*' by the *Morning Herald* and known as the collective lover of the Foxite Whigs, as a result of her liaisons with the Earl of Derby, Lord Frederick Bolingbroke, Lord George Cavendish, and the Prince of Wales.¹²⁹ The complications of this sexual and political fraternity are revealed in a moment of comic farce, recorded by the Duchess of Devonshire in 1781, when Lord George Cavendish allegedly discovered the Prince of Wales hiding behind the door of Mrs Armistead's bedroom.¹³⁰ However, by 1783 (shortly after the end of his affair with Mary Robinson) Charles James Fox was writing to Mrs Armistead as his 'dearest Liz', declaring 'I have examined myself and know that I can better abandon friends, country every thing than live without

¹²⁴ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries, and English Diurnal Form, 1660-1785* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 22; and Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, 'Issues in Studying Women's Diaries: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction', in *Inscribing the Daily* (see Huff, above), pp. 1-20 (p. 19).

¹²⁵ *Town and Country*, July 1776, p. 345. Irene Davis and Katie Hickman are the most recent sources of biographical information on Elizabeth Fox and both scholars speculate that 'Armitstead' (usually spelt 'Armistead') was the name of one of her early protectors. Irene Davis has identified her original name as Elizabeth Bridget Cane from the record of a land purchase. I. M. Davis, *The Harlot and the Statesman: The Story of Elizabeth Armistead & Charles James Fox* (Bourne End: Kensal Press, 1986), pp. 11-12; and Hickman, pp. 83-84.

¹²⁶ *Town and Country*, July 1776, p. 347.

¹²⁷ *Town and Country*, March 1779, pp. 123-24.

¹²⁸ *Town and Country*, March 1779, p. 124.

¹²⁹ *Morning Herald*, 24 January 1781.

¹³⁰ *Correspondence of Georgiana*, p. 291.

Liz'.¹³¹ The relationship with Fox resulted in Mrs Armistead's retirement from the 'Cytherean dance' and her relocation to St Anne's Hill, the Surrey home she purchased following the sale of both her town houses.¹³²

On one level, life at St Anne's was created in opposition to the strains of public life, as John Trotter's delineations of the daily routine of reading, conversation, and walking reveals.¹³³ In his *Recollections*, Samuel Rogers recalled that when Fox 'returns fretted in an evening' Mrs Fox 'takes down a volume of Don Quixote or Gilblas, and reads him into tranquillity'.¹³⁴ Fox's correspondence reinforced this image of Mrs Fox as a domestic carer and in his letters home during the 1790s he internalised and rehearsed her advice, noting, 'Whig Club din[ner] & then to Brooks's where I played at Whist & supped & stayed till past four [...] I did not drink much, but played & gossiped in the card room after sup[per], so I did myself no harm.'¹³⁵ This retreat into domesticity and privacy was compounded by Elizabeth Fox's absence from London during the Westminster election in 1784. Rather than canvassing in the streets or appearing on the hustings alongside the Duchess of Devonshire and Mary Robinson, she acted as a correspondent in St Anne's. However, Fox's letters written during the election were a composite of politics and domesticity, juxtaposing tables detailing his relative standings in the polls with intimate post-scripts. During April and May he queried, 'Have you any leaves out? or any sign of Spring? Are you learning Italian or any thing else? I hope not reading Heroditus' and in another letter 'I hope you have had some cross buns today. O! how I do long to see my Liz!'.¹³⁶ Leslie Mitchell argues that, for the Foxites, politics was intimately connected to friendship and personal attachment.¹³⁷ This tendency is revealed in Charles James Fox's reflections on the potential consequences of war with France in a letter of 1791, 'I do not know that I ever wrote so much pols [politics] to my Liz

¹³¹ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, [n.d.], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 215^r-215^v. For the suggestion that the letter was written in the autumn of 1783, see Davis, p. 56.

¹³² Hickman, pp. 101 and 109; and Davis, p. 52.

¹³³ John Bernard Trotter, *Memoirs of the Latter Years of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (London: Richard Phillips, 1811), pp. 15-16.

¹³⁴ Samuel Rogers, *Recollections* (London: Longman, 1859), p. 20.

¹³⁵ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, Wednesday 1795 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 206^r

¹³⁶ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, 3 May 1784 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 167^v; and C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, 9 April 1784 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 160^r

¹³⁷ L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 92 and 265.

before, but I know you love me dearly and therefore must be interested in things where I am so unavoidably engaged.’¹³⁸ Elizabeth Fox’s identity as a ‘Foxite’ was premised on a personal relationship that shaped her political commitments, typical of a milieu that understood politics as an expression of friendship and friendship as an extension of politics.

Despite the tolerant atmosphere of the Foxite milieu, Elizabeth Fox’s past remained a perpetual presence that had to be socially negotiated. Foxite politicians, such as Richard Fitzpatrick, and male family members, like Fox’s nephew 3rd Lord Holland (or ‘young one’ as the Foxes referred to him), were frequent visitors to St Anne’s. However, apart from Fox’s illegitimate daughter Harriet Willoughby, women of the aristocracy avoided this rural retreat due to the tarnished reputation of the ‘Lady of the Hill’ (as Lord Holland named her). Edward Gibbon, who met the couple in Lausanne on their Continental tour in 1788, encapsulated the general feeling towards ‘Mrs Armistead’ amongst the *bon ton*. He remarked on Fox’s conduct in a letter to Lord Sheffield, concluding that ‘the wit and beauty of his Companion are not sufficient to excuse the scandalous impropriety of shewing her to all Europe’.¹³⁹

There is no record of Mrs Fox’s correspondence prior to her marriage, but reading between the lines of her future husband’s replies she appears to have been acutely conscious of the social ambivalence of her position. In a letter written three days prior to their clandestine wedding, Fox scolds her for the tone of her recent correspondence that was ‘kind as usual, but yet full of doubts’:

I can easily conceive what you say that you had rather see me married to another than have to think that I repented being married to you and wished myself free; but indeed indeed my dearest Angel you never never shall have cause for such a thought. So on Monday Morning you must say Love and obey, and be Mrs Fox.¹⁴⁰

The marriage took place in private on 28 September 1795. Fox maintained a characteristically relaxed attitude to public disclosure, exemplified by his rhetorical

¹³⁸ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, April 1791 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 184^r-184^v

¹³⁹ Quoted in Davis, p. 96.

¹⁴⁰ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, 25 September 1795 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 204^r-204^v

question, 'what sig[nifies] a few additional paragraphs in the Newspaper?'.¹⁴¹ However, the marriage remained secret for a further seven years. It was finally announced prior to the Foxes' tour of the Continent in 1802, following the signing of the Treaty of Amiens. During the peace, Paris was deluged with the English aristocracy and the response to the new Mrs Fox was a mixture of curiosity, suspicion, and hostility. In a letter from Paris of 31 October 1802, Lady Elizabeth Foster commented to the Duchess of Devonshire 'it is supposed that Lady Cholmondeley fains a cold not to call on Mrs Fox, or at least to wait to see what the D^{ss} of Dorset does. I want to go to see her tomorrow'.¹⁴² James Hare also reported that 'the D^{ss} of Gordon, L^y C. Greville, and other English ladies lately arrived, are caballing against her'.¹⁴³ However, despite these apparent difficulties, on Mrs Fox's return to England her new status as Fox's wife enabled her social integration. Fox's relatives and the women of the Whig aristocracy visited her at St Anne's, headed by the Duchess of Devonshire. Fox wrote to the Duchess at the end of 1802 with 'millions of thanks and every grateful feeling' for her 'kindness' to Mrs Fox.¹⁴⁴

'Mrs Secretary Fox'

The Journal begins in response to Mrs Fox's promotion to the role of 'Mrs Secretary Fox'.¹⁴⁵ The first volume of 1806 coincides with Fox's appointment as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the 'Ministry of all the Talents', a coalition formed in the political vacuum created by the death of William Pitt. Therefore, Mrs Fox turns to this insular literary form, more generally associated with a desire for 'psychic privacy', during a period of intense public scrutiny and social dislocation.¹⁴⁶ The Journal enables Mrs Fox to reveal her anxieties and construct a reassuring self-portrait at a time of crisis. As the record of her life as the consort of a statesman, it necessarily crosses the boundaries between public and private. This marriage of ministerial duty and domestic affection is exemplified in her opening reflections, 'Ld G[renville] saw the K[ing] who accepted the new Ministry which God Almighty grant may prove a

¹⁴¹ C. J. Fox, letter to Elizabeth Fox, 25 September 1795 [dated in another hand], BL, Holland House, Add MS 47570, fol. 205^r

¹⁴² *Correspondence of Georgiana*, p. 253.

¹⁴³ *Correspondence of Georgiana*, p. 254.

¹⁴⁴ *Correspondence of Georgiana*, p. 259.

¹⁴⁵ Davis, p. 161.

¹⁴⁶ Felicity Nussbaum, 'Toward Conceptualizing Diary', in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. by James Olney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 135.

fortunate one for the country and for my angel Husband.’¹⁴⁷ She extends her self-construction as Fox’s carer (established in their correspondence of the 1780s and 1790s) by recording her husband’s sleep patterns, exercise, meals, illnesses, and medication and noting his propensity to drink ‘a little too much wine’ at Brooks’s.¹⁴⁸ However, in addition, she scrutinises the success of her performance in a public role, transforming her Journal into a means of self-regulation like the spiritual diaries of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth.

In her *Memoirs*, Mary Robinson revels in her social performances, establishing herself as a striking visual presence and the object of her audience’s gaze. She describes her costumes in intricate detail, such as the ‘dark claret-coloured riding-habit’ of her arrival at Tregunter or the ‘white chip hat’ of Ranelagh.¹⁴⁹ In contrast, Elizabeth Fox anxiously erases herself from the stage, evident in her description of the ball she organised in Bedford House on 19 May 1806.

Did not get to sleep till six in the morning a very bad head ach very busy all the morning getting ready for the Ball Harriet and I dined at Mrs Bouveries came home at eight to dress very tired and frightened for fear I should not be able to get through the fatigue of the night the rooms were light up by nine and the people began to come about half past of 12 very full indeed in the whole I fancy about 400 there were 240 sat down to supper and between forty and fifty that sat down afterwards every thing seemed to give satisfaction the Ball room and Gardens certainly were very beautiful.¹⁵⁰

Elizabeth Fox is physically displaced, as her body features only in the ‘very bad head ach’ and her return to the house ‘very tired and frightened for fear’. This tautological expression reveals her anxiety over hosting a function she could never have entered in her former guise as ‘Mrs Armistead’. Her specific enumerations of the attendees are closer to Mary Fletcher’s records of her prayer meetings than Robinson or Steele’s breathless accounts of the guests at the Pantheon. In her tentative conclusion, ‘every thing seemed to give satisfaction’, she refracts her response to the event through the eyes of the participants. According to a *bon mot*, recorded in the correspondence of Lady Elizabeth Spencer-Stanhope, at Mrs Fox’s ball ‘there was all the world, but little

¹⁴⁷ ‘Mrs Fox’s Journal’, BL, Holland House, Add MS 51476, 3 February 1806. In this section, references to ‘Mrs Fox’s Journal’ will be provided in the footnotes (rather than in parentheses) in order to avoid disrupting the flow of the text with lengthy citations.

¹⁴⁸ MS 51476, 21 January 1806.

¹⁴⁹ Robinson, *Memoirs*, I. 87 and 95.

¹⁵⁰ MS 51476, 19 May 1806.

of his wife!'.¹⁵¹ There is no mention of this in Mrs Fox's account, but the uncharacteristic blank page that follows the entry may obliquely register her disappointment at the scarcity of female participants.

Like the autobiography of Mary Fletcher, Mrs Fox's Journal is radically transformed by widowhood. Following the death of Charles James Fox on 13 September 1806, the record of domestic care and social performance becomes a poignant expression of grief and a heartbreaking memorial to a political icon. During Fox's illness the Journal provides a daily record of his diet, sleep, pains, and medication. Mrs Fox registers her despair in the entries from July, which are abbreviated to 'much the same' and 'a good deal better'. She ultimately collapses into silence, commenting that 'all the days so much alike that I did not think it necessary to say any thing'.¹⁵² She presents a tragic portrait of their final drive in the garden at St Anne's:

He was very chearful and talked a good deal to me kept my hand in his all the time we were out made me kiss him several times and admired the Thames that we saw in the road back from Kew Bridge and made me repeat from Cooper's Hill, Thames the most loved &c.¹⁵³

Elizabeth Fox borrows from the memorialising deathbed scenes of the spiritual conversion narratives, replicating Mary Fletcher's determination to protect the memory of her 'saintly' husband through an intimate 'account of his precious death'.¹⁵⁴ Mrs Fox convenes family and friends around the bed, noting her husband's 'heavenly smile' and recording his final words, 'I die happy; but pity you' and 'it don't signify my dearest dearest Liz'.¹⁵⁵ In the prayer that concludes this testimony, Mrs Fox echoes Fletcher's strategy for survival and expresses her future commitment to living in memoriam. She notes, 'merciful Father let me adore thy great goodness to me oh make me worthy of it and of my dear departed angels affection for me.'¹⁵⁶ Her grief is eloquently conveyed in the two blank pages that follow this entreaty.

¹⁵¹ *The Letter-Bag of Lady Elizabeth Spencer-Stanhope*, ed. by A. M. W. Stirling, 2 vols (London: John Lane, 1913), I, 52.

¹⁵² MS 51476, 12 July 1806.

¹⁵³ MS 51476, August 1806. Entries from 1 August until 20 September are organised by month, rather than by day.

¹⁵⁴ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', John Rylands Library, Fletcher-Tooth Collection, Box 23, MS IV, 11.

¹⁵⁵ MS 51476, September 1806.

¹⁵⁶ MS 51476, September 1806.

'To make myself more worthy of thee'

By adopting a cyclical structure and expressing her experience in a repetitive vocabulary, Elizabeth Fox finds an alternative framework for her self-articulations from the literary genres adapted by Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Steele. Rather than attempting to rewrite the narrative of her sexual fall from grace, Mrs Fox avoids direct engagement with her former self. She repeatedly deploys euphemistic descriptions of the past, exemplified by her remarks on the death of 3rd Viscount Bolingbroke in 1824 (the son of her first protector 'Bully'):

He was the oldest friend I had in this World & it is impossible to lose those one has long known to be a sincere friend without feeling deeply their loss I was a young giddy girl when I first knew him.¹⁵⁷

Her self-characterisation as the 'young giddy girl' is reiterated in her account of a meeting in 1815 with Louisa Payne, who was the daughter of a family she knew in London at the height of her career when she was 'young and foolish enough God knows-----'.¹⁵⁸ Mrs Fox reflects, 'I had not seen her for some years it is just forty two years since I first knew her, she was then a child and I a giddy foolish girl ----- --', as the flourish of dashes are required to cover a multitude of 'sins'.¹⁵⁹

Mrs Fox therefore avoids vindicating or sentimentalising her past life and instead writes in the style of Mary Fletcher, casting herself as the posthumous survivor and protector of her husband's legacy. She creates her relational identity through her attachment to a 'beloved' and structures her future as a quest to be worthy of his love. Charles James Fox is figured as her creator and her marriage is understood as a conjugal conversion or a moment of spiritual and social rebirth that is relived through the anniversaries of their relationship. Each year she notes her husband's death on 13 September, their wedding day of 28 September, his birthday of 24 January, and the 7 May 1795 that he said 'was the happiest day of his life' and which he immortalised in verse:

¹⁵⁷ MS 51492, 9 December 1824.

¹⁵⁸ MS 51485, 4 March 1818.

¹⁵⁹ MS 51482, 5 August 1815.

The seventh of May
 Is the happiest day
 That ever I knew in my life
 The day it was fine
 The Birds sang divine
 And I was all day with my wife.¹⁶⁰

These anniversaries are punctuated by uncontextualised expressions of loss. On the anniversary of Fox's death in 1821 she comments 'alas! this day brings sad, sad thoughts with it ----' and on his birthday in 1816 she begins 'a sad, sad day this for me and a sad sick headache'.¹⁶¹ In the entry on their wedding anniversary in 1831, she notes:

This day thirty eight years ago my beloved made me his wife which he used to say was the happiest day of his life I am sure it made me the happiest of women and I must always feel vain at being the choice of such a man - But alas! it has left me a poor miserable creature.¹⁶²

She echoes the words of Fox's poem in her claim to be the 'happiest' of women and experiences a temporary sense of validation in her recollections that she was the 'choice of such a man'. These feelings are reminiscent of Mary Tooth's pride in the 'precious privileges' of her position as the spiritual protégé of Mary Fletcher.¹⁶³ She refracts her self-image through Fox's 'dear eyes' that are perpetual presences in her writing. His death is the moment 'those dear Eyes were closed on me for ever' and her acceptance of her loss is signalled in her recognition that she will 'see no more those dear Eyes that made all places beautiful'.¹⁶⁴ Fox's perception enhances and redeems and by recalling 'that dear face which always looked on me with delight' she restores her sense of self-worth.¹⁶⁵

This attempt to restore her connection to Fox through memory and text finds its physical corollary in her relationship to the domestic interior and the natural landscape of St Anne's Hill. She suggests that she is able to re-attach herself to her husband through the talismanic effects of material objects, commenting in 1808:

¹⁶⁰ MS 51490, 7 May 1821; and MS 51502, 7 May 1835.

¹⁶¹ MS 51490, 13 September 1821; and MS 51482, 24 January 1816.

¹⁶² MS 51498, 28 September 1831.

¹⁶³ 'Journal of Mary Tooth', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 14, MS G, Box 23 August 1800.

¹⁶⁴ MS 51482, 13 September 1815; and MS 51476, 20 September 1806.

¹⁶⁵ MS 51498, 21 November 1831.

Dear dear home it is both pleasure and pain to be here I cannot divest myself of the feeling that he who was my all of happiness in this world, is still near me when I am here seeing the same things which his dear eyes have so often looked on with delight and touching the same things, and sitting on the same chairs is a pleasure though a melancholy one. Oh my God teach me to be good and make me worthy of his dear memory by doing every thing the remainder of my life the same as if he were still indeed with me.¹⁶⁶

The interdependence between her personal identity as the 'Lady of the Hill' and the physical materiality of St Anne's is foregrounded in the financial crisis of 1819, when she fears she will be forced to sell the house as a result of mounting debts. She experiences recurrent headaches for over a month and confesses in her Journal:

I greatly fear without something happens soon to enable me to pay my debts, I must I fear give it up, though it will wring my heart to do so, I have been so very, very happy here that it seems a part of myself-----¹⁶⁷

The entry is followed by a series of black lines scratched into the paper, expressing in meta-linguistic form the emotional consequences of this threatened separation. The Journal records her physical bond with the location, evoking the rhythms and textures of nature. She sees 'the Hay-making in the park', hears the 'Birds singing delightfully', and feels 'still the same rain, rain'.¹⁶⁸ She grounds herself in the landscape, mourning the loss of a tree in the language of bereavement when she notes, 'one of the three Trees in the park blown down it made me very uncomfortable'.¹⁶⁹ Sixteen years later, she records the fall of three elms in a vocabulary reminiscent of her lament for the declining number of Foxites, commenting 'a sad loss - I fear they will all be gone very soon'.¹⁷⁰

On one level, Mrs Fox's aspiration for 'doing every thing the remainder of my life the same as if he were still indeed with me' works against a sense of personal progress and presents stasis as an ideal.¹⁷¹ However, in the rhythms of nature, Mrs Fox discovers an alternative model of continuity and self-development from Robinson's narrative of artistic progress or Steele's account of social advancement. She notes annually the first asparagus, cucumbers, peas, and strawberries and records the first time she hears a cuckoo or a nightingale. She experiences an affinity with this solitary

¹⁶⁶ MS 51477, 17 January 1808.

¹⁶⁷ MS 51486, 16 March 1819.

¹⁶⁸ MS 51478, 19 June 1809; MS 51480, 26 February 1812; and MS 51492, 24 June 1824.

¹⁶⁹ MS 51479, 14 December 1810.

¹⁷⁰ MS 51493, 12 April 1826.

¹⁷¹ MS 51477, 17 January 1808.

bird, remarking in May 1823 ‘a beautiful day, and the Nightingales seemed to enjoy it as much as I did’.¹⁷² She records her pleasure in pruning, harvesting, and planting her recent purchases from the nurseries in Crees and Staines and imagines this cultivation as part of her quest to be worthy of her husband’s memory, reflecting, ‘why do I endeavour every day to make it more beautiful it is, yes, I am sure it is, because I feel as if that dear one was still with me’.¹⁷³ For Mrs Fox, gardening is a life-affirming labour rather than an activity premised on aesthetic detachment or critical appreciation.

‘Seeing those we love and that we know love us always does us good’

Mrs Fox’s self-identification as the ‘Lady of the Hill’, whose greatest pleasure is ‘gossiping’ in the garden, presents a stark contrast to Mary Robinson’s self-image as the solitary poet, who responds to nature in aesthetic isolation. Life writing enables Robinson to transform her social exile into an artistic strength, whereas, the Journal allows Mrs Fox to create a reassuring image of communal belonging and establish herself within a collective family history. The Journal’s status as a record of attachment is symbolised by Mrs Fox’s decision to write the volumes for October 1811 to April 1813 in a blank address book. The pages of the Journal are densely populated with comments on family and friends, as Mrs Fox provides a detailed record of visitors and monitors the health and welfare of those she loves. The pattern of the entries and the length and regularity of their composition are shaped by the external pressures of her social activities. Visitors interrupt her writing and retrospective notations of births and deaths inhabit the margins of her family chronicle.¹⁷⁴ Members of Fox’s immediate family from across the generations¹⁷⁵, particularly Lord Holland and Caroline Fox, mingle with former Foxites, including Lord Robert Spencer and General Richard Fitzpatrick, Whig aristocrats, such as the Duke and Duchess of Bedford, and neighbours, like the Porters, whose departure from

¹⁷² MS 51491, 1 May 1823.

¹⁷³ MS 51480, 12 April 1812.

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion of the seventeenth-century domestic memoir, see Peterson, *Victorian Women’s Autobiography*, pp. 16-27.

¹⁷⁵ After Fox’s death, Mrs Fox became the protector and guardian of his illegitimate children Harriet Willoughby and Harry Fox. Leslie Mitchell interprets Fox’s failure to mention his son in his will as evidence that Henry (known as ‘Harry’) died before 1806. However, Mrs Fox’s Journal shows he was still alive in 1833 and living in an institution for the mentally ill in Parsons Green. Mitchell, p. 238; and MS 51499, 26 June 1833.

Chertsey Mrs Fox describes as 'like losing part of my family'.¹⁷⁶ The multitude of named public figures evokes the crowds of aristocrats in Elizabeth Steele's *Memoirs*. However, while Steele revels in her ability to throw 'the cap at individuals' through the medium of print, Mrs Fox inscribes herself within this aristocratic community and foregrounds her commitment to others.¹⁷⁷ Despite the inevitable compromises of attachment, Mrs Fox insists that 'there is no happiness without having something to love' and notes that 'seeing those we love and that we know love us always does us good'.¹⁷⁸

This altruistic model of selfhood that exchanges the role of heroine for collective identification and communal belonging is reminiscent of the interdependent selves of Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth. Like these Methodist women, Mrs Fox attains a degree of public agency by extending her familial role to become a philanthropist and reformer, embedded within the local community of Chertsey. The Journal records her involvement with the charity school, the Chertsey summer fair, and the local church. She also chronicles her political participation in the local Surrey constituency, observing the daily progress and outcome of elections, vetting local candidates, and campaigning for the Whigs. In a Journal entry written at the age of eighty, she notes, 'called at five or six places to canvas got the promise of a good many plumpers for Mr Denison.'¹⁷⁹ However, this self-construction as a philanthropist and political reformer is also a sign of her social integration. Mrs Fox's desire to establish herself within a female circle is evoked in her reflections on her reading, as she notes in her Journal in 1819 that studying 'Buxton on prisons' 'makes me quite long to be like Mrs Fry & her friends, what Excellent women they must be---'.¹⁸⁰

This aspiration finds expression in Mrs Fox's account of a dinner organised in Chertsey to celebrate the passing of the Reform Act in September 1832. The Journal depicts the spectacle of the 'neat' and 'comfortably dressed' diners, but it is the image of Mrs Fox's social inclusion that dominates the account:

¹⁷⁶ MS 51490, 8 June 1821.

¹⁷⁷ Steele, VI, 197.

¹⁷⁸ MS 51491, 8 June 1823; and MS 51505, 29 November 1837.

¹⁷⁹ MS 51497, 2 August 1830. A plumper was a vote cast at an election for a single candidate when the voter had the right to vote for two or more candidates. *OED*.

¹⁸⁰ MS 51486, Book List 1818-1819. Thomas Fowell Buxton, *An Inquiry, whether Crime and Misery are Produced or Prevented, by our Present System of Prison Discipline* (London: Arch, 1818).

Walked to a very handsome marquee that was made ready for the Ladies where there was a very comfortable seat for me the other Ladies had chairs round. It was very gratifying to me to find that nearly the whole of the neighbourhood was there and eager to shew me every civility.¹⁸¹

Mrs Fox's enclosure in a circle of 'Ladies', shown every 'civility' by the 'neighbourhood', rewrites her existence prior to her marriage when she was forced to wait in the carriage outside her neighbours' residences while Fox went visiting. It also suggests that Mrs Fox attained a degree of social acceptance in later life. In contrast to Mary Robinson's fantasy of posthumous inclusion in a community of female artists or Elizabeth Steele's self-identification as the champion of her sex, Mrs Fox discovered female solidarity through the feminine ideal of philanthropy.

In her *Memoirs*, Mary Robinson establishes herself as a published author and a writing subject rather than an object of the public gaze. In her Journal, Mrs Fox presents herself as a cultural consumer, embedded within a polite community of taste. In her social and cultural itineraries, she disassociates the fashionable 'Mrs Armistead' from the refined Mrs Fox and records her trips to Covent Garden, the opera, the exhibitions of Hogarth and Gainsborough, concerts at the Argyle rooms, and a lecture on astronomy. She incorporates the language of the press into the Journal, exemplified in her suggestions that the 'Liverpool Museum' and the panoramas of 'St Petersburg and Spitzbergen' are both 'well worth seeing'.¹⁸² In contrast to Elizabeth Steele's breathless 'gallop' through public amusements, encapsulated in the image of herself and Baddeley off 'to the play; from thence, before the entertainment was over, away to Ranelagh', Mrs Fox pauses to make critical reflections.¹⁸³ Following her visit to Drury Lane in May 1814, she notes:

Went early to the play Drury Lane the Duke of Bedford's box, to see Mr Kean in Richard, with whom we were all delighted, I certainly think him very good and I may say the best actor there has been since Garrick who I saw the last year he performed, Kean wants figure and voice, but makes up by his attention to the parts and the vivacity with which he does his own part, so that you forget the actor & see Richard himself, the rest of the performers were vile.¹⁸⁴

In the Journal, she becomes the viewer of her own act of spectatorship and establishes herself as a cultural insider in her own eyes. She foregrounds the pleasures of the

¹⁸¹ MS 51498, 4 September 1832.

¹⁸² MS 51479, 16 May 1810; and MS 51486, 18 May 1819.

¹⁸³ Steele, IV, 164-65.

¹⁸⁴ MS 51481, 16 May 1814.

imagination and the rational mind over the physical sensations of the sexualised body. She also demonstrates her familiarity with the great actors of past and present and provides a considered critique of Kean's performance, experienced from her elevated position in the box of the 6th Duke of Bedford. In these asides, she never alludes to her brief career as an actress during the mid-1770s and, unlike Steele and Robinson, she confines her observations to the events on stage.¹⁸⁵ John Brewer argues that eighteenth-century life writing 'revealed, to an unprecedented degree, the desire to shape a person's identity around ideals of politeness, taste and refinement'.¹⁸⁶ For Mrs Fox, imagining herself as a cultural critic enables her to reconfigure herself as the active, perceiving subject rather than the commodified object of the public gaze.

Mrs Fox therefore writes herself out of the transgressive role of the courtesan and establishes herself within communities of charity and taste. However, in addition, her identity as a 'Foxite' (at once a familial, political, and social self-definition) allows her to articulate her connections to past sexual partners in terms of friendship and politics. Irene Davis speculates that Mrs Fox destroyed the volumes of the Journal that contained reflections on the deaths of her former lovers in an attempt to retrospectively suppress the feelings she had articulated at the time.¹⁸⁷ However, while the argument is tenable for the missing volumes from 1813 to 1814 (which coincide with the death of General Richard Fitzpatrick), Davis's claim that the volume for May 1830 to May 1831 is missing and that Lord John Townshend died during this period is inaccurate.¹⁸⁸ In addition, this conclusion overlooks the Journal's highly effective rhetorical strategies for containing the past, evident in Mrs Fox's reflections on her former lover George IV. In comparison to Mary Robinson's romantic narrative of 'fairy visions', the relationship between Mrs Fox and the Prince of Wales is a political friendship that is mediated through their shared connection to Charles James Fox.¹⁸⁹ Mrs Fox may have understood this relationship in political terms from the outset, since their sexual liaison seems to have been as much an attempt to secure the heir to the throne for the Opposition as a romantically or

¹⁸⁵ Davis, pp. 17-19.

¹⁸⁶ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 110.

¹⁸⁷ Davis, p. 186.

¹⁸⁸ The Journal for this period is still available in the archive and the missing volumes span from 24 August 1828 to 20 April 1829. Lord John Townshend died in 1833.

¹⁸⁹ Robinson, *Memoirs*, II, 71.

financially motivated connection. However, in the Journal, the atmosphere of politico-sex of the 1770s and 1780s mellows into friendship and domesticity that is more suited to the moral climate of the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In the early volumes of the Journal, Mrs Fox is estranged from the Prince of Wales. She interprets his abandonment of the Foxite Whigs, Lords Grey and Grenville, and his support for the Tory administration during the Regency of 1811 as a betrayal of Fox's memory. She claims that the only consolation for her husband's death is that if he had lived 'the conduct of those he thought well of would have made him suffer greatly' and recalls that the Prince snubs her at the Egham races in 1814.¹⁹⁰ However, the rift is healed on a visit to the Brighton Pavilion in her seventies when she notes, the King 'came up to me and embraced me in the most kind and friendly way'.¹⁹¹ Following their meeting, she is presented with an annuity of five hundred pounds. However, this financial exchange is understood as the pension of a statesman's widow rather than the belated settlement of a former courtesan, as she comments, 'I am sure by His conduct to me that he loved my Angel Husband and regrets his loss.'¹⁹² In a fitting expression of her domestic respectability, she reciprocates by sending the King a jar of marmalade that is made from the orange trees at St Anne's. From this point on, she also includes observations on the King's health in her Journal. In the aftermath of his death, which took place on 26 June 1830, Mrs Fox travels to the chapel at Windsor. She recounts that their last meeting 'put me so in mind of former times when he used to stop here in his way to Windsor and often partake of our little dinners'.¹⁹³ Characteristically, she mediates the death of a former lover through her memories of domestic bliss with Fox at St Anne's.

'Such is the sad trials left for the survivor'

The Journal suggests that Mrs Fox's strategies of self-creation liberate her from the past and root her within the social landscape. However, the ruptures and fissures in her writing also demonstrate the precariousness of a selfhood forged in relation to

¹⁹⁰ MS 51480, 26 February 1812; and MS 51481, 10 June 1814.

¹⁹¹ MS 51491, 19 January 1824.

¹⁹² MS 51492, 21 July 1824.

¹⁹³ MS 51497, 21 July 1830. This entry establishes the existence of the Journal for the period May 1830 to May 1831, in contradiction to Davis's claim. Davis, p. 186.

others, underpinned by an absence, and dependent on group harmony. The inconstancy of friendship threatens Mrs Fox's carefully constructed image of social-inclusion. Following a visit to Mrs Plumer in 1808, she comments, 'had not seen her for near a year she is a kind warm hearted friend in which I see no difference from former times alas not so all that call themselves friends.'¹⁹⁴ In addition, Mrs Fox reveals the pressure of attaching her identity to a family in which she is insecurely placed. She recalls an encounter with Lady Holland that occurs during a visit to Holland House in 1814:

I must own I could not but feel hurt at being turned out of the house in such a way, having seen so little of dear young one and his Children, & who I am not likely to see again for so long a time - that Ld H should allow me to be driven out of his house in such a way did indeed surprise me but-----
----- I must not allow myself to say all I feel on this subject.¹⁹⁵

The repetition of 'such a way' substitutes for an actual description of the eviction by Lady Holland who, as a divorcee, perhaps wished to disassociate herself from a woman who acted as a perpetual reminder of her own doubtful respectability.¹⁹⁶ Mrs Fox refuses to verbalise her feelings even to herself, struggling between self-expression and self-regulation in the movement from 'I must own' to 'I must not allow'. The cohesion of the group portrait must be retained at all costs. However, her feelings manifest textually and physically in the violent dashes scratched into the paper and the return to St Anne's 'with a very bad headache which I have had for some days'.¹⁹⁷ For Mrs Fox, sociability is premised on polite civility and the Journal is integral to this process of self-regulation. She fears that grief is socially alienating and self-indulgent, commenting in 1810, 'I find misery is a thing so frightful that people do not like to live with those that are so'.¹⁹⁸ She echoes this sentiment on the eighth anniversary of Fox's death, confessing, 'I go about as if I was happy, which God knows I can never be in this world, at least comparatively to what I have been, but we owe it to society to keep our miseries as much as possible to ourselves.'¹⁹⁹ The

¹⁹⁴ MS 51477, 8 March 1808.

¹⁹⁵ MS 51481, 20 July 1814.

¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Holland, *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland (1791–1811)*, ed. by Earl of Ilchester, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1908), I, x–xviii.

¹⁹⁷ MS 51481, 20 July 1814.

¹⁹⁸ MS 51478, 6 January 1810.

¹⁹⁹ MS 51481, 13 September 1814.

Journal therefore becomes a means to manage her bereavement and reveals the regulatory demands of polite sociability.

The crowds of mourners at Mrs Fox's funeral in 1842 testify to her capacity to inspire friendship and attachment. Forty local tradesmen accompanied the official cortège that included the Fox family, Whig aristocrats, and the gentry of Chertsey, while townspeople lined the road to the Church.²⁰⁰ However, despite the success of her social boundary crossing, at times Mrs Fox imagines herself in a state of heartbreaking isolation and reduces the multitude of visitors who populate her Journal to a list of acquaintances. Following the death of Lady Spencer in 1825, she presents herself 'almost alone in this world of miseries the only friend that I believed loved me is gone'.²⁰¹ Repeatedly, Mrs Fox suggests that she is only of value as 'widow Fox' rather than intrinsically worthy of affection. On the death of Lord Robert Spencer, she remarks, 'I have lost a sincere and attached friend, he loved me for the sake of my beloved Husband'.²⁰² When she hears of Lord King's death she comments, 'he was so truly attached to the memory of my beloved Husband, and both he and his family were all kindness to me.'²⁰³ In this model of friendship, Fox's memory seems to guarantee kindness to 'dearest Liz'.

However, in addition to doubts over her self-worth, Mrs Fox's impulse to attach herself to the present through memories and former relationships produces acute feelings of 'belatedness'. Mrs Fox constructs herself as the survivor of a former era and a relic of the past. Her self-conception as a scarce repository of family history is a source of affirmation, reminiscent of Mary Tooth's self-definition as an individual uniquely placed to preserve and perpetuate the Fletcher legacy. However, the recurrent loss of friends during the 1810s produces feelings of dislocation, revealed in Mrs Fox's remarks on a visit to the monument of General Richard Fitzpatrick at Sunning Hill in 1819. In her role as caretaker, Mrs Fox notes her intention to ensure some ivy is planted and the inscription repainted. However, instead, she descends into desolate reflections on her posthumous position:

²⁰⁰ Davis, p. 211.

²⁰¹ MS 51493, 21 November 1825.

²⁰² MS 51497, 25 June 1831.

²⁰³ MS 51499, 5 June 1833.

A melancholy task God knows but such is the sad trials left for the survivor alas! who will there be to do any kind offices to my memory I seem to have outlived the kindness of most of my friends, at least of those who used to call themselves such but I have the satisfaction to feel that I have not deserved their neglect-----.²⁰⁴

This evocative image of Mrs Fox as the survivor, tending the monument and serving the memory of the dead, is a momentary embodiment of the authorial voice of the Journal. However, in this crisis she projects forward to imagine herself as the victim of human inconstancy isolated in death, in a blend of Robinson's resentment at her social exile and Mary Fletcher's self-construction as a 'consort and relict'. The dashes substitute for an explicit criticism of fickle friends and testify to the potential compromises of connection.

The identity of 'widow Fox' is underpinned by an absence and defined by loss. However, by positioning herself within a community of mourners and understanding herself as an integral part of the culture of remembrance of the Foxite Whigs, she discovers consolation in a shared grief and a collective history. She recounts her pleasure on hearing 'the respect and enthusiasm in which my angel Husbands Character was spoken of' at the local reform dinners of Chertsey and reports the national sense of mourning at his funeral:²⁰⁵

They tell me this was attended by so many proofs from all ranks of people of love and esteem for his Memory and deep felt regret for his loss that I cannot but feel gratified that so much greatness was not thrown quite away upon an ungrateful world.²⁰⁶

The cult of Fox endured for, as Rogers rightly surmises, 'glorious was his course; and long the track of light he left behind him'.²⁰⁷ The Journal reveals that nineteenth-century Whigs such as Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell were frequent visitors to St Anne's, as Mrs Fox provided a valuable link to their political past. However, Mrs Fox's intimate knowledge of a political icon also allows her to assert herself, evident in her reflections on Lord Grey's plans for the inscription of Fox's monument at Westminster Abbey in 1820:

²⁰⁴ MS 51487, 28 October 1819.

²⁰⁵ MS 51499, 10 January 1833.

²⁰⁶ MS 51476, 10 October 1806.

²⁰⁷ Rogers, p. 77.

I think very good and full of warm Expressions appears to me to be fitter for a paragraph in history than for an inscription for a Monument I am afraid my not liking it so well as many of my friends do may hurt Ld Grey which will give me real pain to do but as I was asked to give my opinion I felt I ought to say exactly what I really did feel about it, and the more I think of it, the greater difficulty I am convinced there is of any persons writing what would satisfy me on this subject, I am therefore more than ever convinced that the name only is the best to have on the Monument.²⁰⁸

This impulse to raise her voice above the crowd and disturb a polite consensus seems incompatible with the fear of confrontation manifested in her eviction from Holland House. Seemingly, she sees a value in her own opinions as the guardian of Fox's legacy, even if this strength is discovered through ventriloquising his words rather than speaking in her own voice, as she claims, 'I am sure if it were possible to know my angels opinion it would be to have his name only on his Monument'.²⁰⁹

'I could believe I had written myself'

For Mrs Fox, writing and reading is an extension of loving and remembering rather than a means of self-vindication, self-fictionalisation, or literary self-fashioning. This interpretation of the relationship between self and text is revealed in her book lists and critical commentaries, written from back to front in each of the thirty-one volumes of her Journal. She reinforces her connection to a political and social milieu through her literary engagements, comparable to Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth's expression of their faith through reading the exemplary lives of fellow Methodists. Literature is imagined as a mode of sociability, as she reads works written by friends, such as Lord King and Isabella St John, and the memoirs of former Foxites, such as Sheridan and George IV. Texts are also invested with the potential to revive an absent presence and collapse geographical boundaries. During Caroline Fox's tour of Europe in 1839, Mrs Fox notes, 'finished Le Maistre Travels Through France Italy Switzerland & Germany had much delight in Traveling with dear Miss Fox'.²¹⁰ The dominant presence within

²⁰⁸ MS 51488, 11 July 1820.

²⁰⁹ MS 51488, 1 August 1820.

²¹⁰ MS 51506, Book List 1839. J. G. Lemaistre, *Travels after the Peace of Amiens, through Parts of France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany*, 3 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1806).

her book lists is Fox, evident in her reflections on her recurrent readings of his 'dear History' of James II:²¹¹

To be sure one need never read any thing Else to learn to be good and wise, for, History, Philosophy, Morality, Every thing that can teach the love of goodness, truth and justice are there better expressed than they ever were before or ever will be again – and when I think of the dear author his heavenly countenance when walking up and down this room while composing this work, I am astonished that I could have bore up against the loss.²¹²

The text is both an evocative symbol of a past domestic moment and a secular bible that offers a pattern of public citizenship and private morality. She binds herself within a community of readers in the transition from public benefit to private loss, as Fox becomes temporarily a 'dear author' rather than a beloved husband.

Despite Mrs Fox's fabulous personal history and the extraordinary romance of her life, she avoids the advice of Elizabeth Steele to 'conceive the whole as a fable'.²¹³ Instead, she turns to history and politics for models through which to explore her identity and explain her experience. Mrs Fox's violent comments on Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*, expressed in her book list in 1814, are a typical response to extremes of poetic licence. She notes, 'this Authoress should have died with Evelina for there never was a more tiresome thing than this same Wanderer, and the style is as bad as the situations impossible, no woman could ever have been in such.'²¹⁴ However, in contrast to her deliberate disassociation from fictional heroines, Mrs Fox aligns herself with iconic female figures of Whig political history. This was common practice within her community because to the Whigs 'history was personal' and Foxites often interpreted the contemporary political landscape through the lens of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.²¹⁵ However, Mrs Fox imagines a more intimate relationship to the past, discovering a source of textual consolation and sympathetic identification in the letters of Lady Rachel Russell (1636-1723) wife and widow of the Whig martyr Lord William Russell (1639-1683).²¹⁶ This connection is based on

²¹¹ The history was published posthumously by Lord Holland in 1808 and appears on Mrs Fox's book lists in 1825, 1833, and 1836. Charles James Fox, *A History of the Early Part of the Reign of James the Second* (London: William Miller, 1808).

²¹² MS 51493, Book List 1825.

²¹³ Steele, V, 65.

²¹⁴ MS 51481, Book List 1814. Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, 5 vols (London: Longman, 1814).

²¹⁵ Mitchell, p. 191.

²¹⁶ Rachel Russell, *Letters of Lady Rachel Russell*, 3rd edn (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1774).

their shared position within an ongoing political history and the parallels in their personal experience. Lady Russell's letters recount her struggle to suppress her grief, manage her estate, and act as the guardian of her husband's political legacy in the aftermath of his death. In her commentary on the *Letters*, Mrs Fox notes:

They are many of them beautiful poor woman her trials in this world were hard indeed – there is one sentence in the 6th Letter which I could believe I had written myself where she says 'I know it is common with others to lose a friend; but to have lived with such a one, it may be questioned how few can glory in the like happiness, so consequently lament the like loss'.²¹⁷

She summarises Lady Russell's suffering in terms reminiscent of her own 'sad trials', registering her sympathetic connection in the verbal echo. Reading the correspondence locates Mrs Fox within a Whig elite, allowing her to interpret her experiences through her political ancestors. However, at the same time, it reinforces her privileged status as one of the 'few' who can 'glory in the like happiness' of loving and being loved by a public icon. Mrs Fox meets her historical counterpart again in an Exhibition of May 1825, noting in her Journal, 'some very fine pictures particularly that of the Trial of Lord Russell. Ly Russell quite beautiful.'²¹⁸ She extends the connection further by reading Mary Berry's 'Lady Russells Life and Letters from the Devonshire Papers' in 1819 and the 'Historical Memoirs of the House of Russell' in 1834, of which she remarks 'makes one quite in love with the name so many good and worthy people seldom are found in so numerous a family'.²¹⁹

The 'Historical Memoirs' of a family is a more fitting characterisation of Mrs Fox's Journal and closer to her self-conception as an author than the social satire of Elizabeth Steele or the literary self-fashioning of Mary Robinson. In the Journal, Elizabeth Fox resists literary genres and attaches her identity to communal histories and cyclical structures. She evades the 'sins' of her past and reinvents herself in her conjugal conversion. In comparison to Elizabeth Steele's capacity to play 'many parts' or Mary Robinson's awareness of her 'acute sensibility', Mrs Fox is able to absorb herself within collective identifications on the basis of family, community, and political affiliation. Yet Mrs Fox's Journal also reveals that grounding the self in

²¹⁷ MS 51481, Book List 1815.

²¹⁸ MS 51493, 23 May 1825.

²¹⁹ MS 51487, Book List 1819; and MS 51501, Book List 1834. Mary Berry, *Some Account of the Life of Rachael Wriothesley, Lady Russell* (London: Longman, 1819); and J. H. Wiffen, *Historical Memoirs of the House of Russell: From the Time of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1833).

attachments, altruism, and social networks demands rigorous self-regulation, produces feelings of 'belatedness', and potentially displaces the author from her own self-portrait. Steele's *Memoirs* bears the scars of its strident engagement with the sexual and literary marketplace and, in the image of Steele speaking 'for her sex' while dressed in male attire, revives a liberating model of female authorship from a former era. Robinson is more attuned to her cultural moment at the turn of the nineteenth century. For in the *Memoirs*, she foregrounds her roles as a woman of feeling, dutiful mother, and Romantic poet rather than a feminist polemicist or a political radical. As a consequence, her narrative presents a compelling account of a woman writer's personal challenges and establishes her cultural authority. By comparison, Mrs Fox avoids both Steele's entanglement with print culture and Robinson's feelings of social dislocation by absorbing herself within a cast of characters. Her assimilation is a consolation for her grief and a source of public agency. However, her capacity for critical self-consciousness or self-expression is at times overwhelmed by the demands of her representative status, as she relinquishes the right to plot her own course. In my next chapter, I take up the issues raised by the autobiographical practices of Elizabeth Steele, Mary Robinson, and Elizabeth Fox. I explore the reinvention of the sentimental heroine for a post-revolutionary age and consider the consequences of attaching the self to a collective political history, within the turbulent landscape of the French Revolution.

THREE

Revolutionary Subjects and Collective Memories: British Women Writers in the French Revolution

In the final chapter of this study, I discuss the eyewitness accounts of British women writers living in Paris during the French Revolution and consider the implications of defining the self through political affiliation. In their self-representations, the courtesans reveal the challenge of writing from a socially disconnected position. In contrast, radical and royalist women writers articulate their lives from within a political community. Their capacity to connect personal experience to collective history is reminiscent of women writers in the spiritual realm. For these revolutionary historians are able to draw on their membership of a community in order to authorise a public intervention, like Quaker Catharine Phillips. However, they also risk relinquishing self-expression as they cast themselves as representative subjects or embodiments of the past, like Methodist Mary Fletcher. They explore the capacity of the language of sensibility to articulate a political agenda, like Elizabeth Steele and Mary Robinson, and demonstrate the flexibility of literary genres and fictional identifications as they revise the sentimental heroine for a post-revolutionary age. In addition, like Elizabeth Fox and Mary Tooth, their life writing suggests that attaching the self to a collective political history enables personal continuity but also has the potential to displace the woman writer from her own narrative.

In my discussion of the courtesans, I examine the ways in which Elizabeth Steele, Mary Robinson, and Elizabeth Fox put personal history into public service in order to re-establish a sense of social connection. In my final chapter, I continue to address the ways women writers balance their impulse for self-determination with their desire for social being and a shared history. I examine the ways in which women conceive of themselves as public citizens and political subjects, assess the implications of both radical and royalist commitments for women writers, and suggest what is at stake in attaching the self to a collective history. I argue that political affiliation provides a valuable means of self-definition, enables self-development, and allows women to connect private life and personal attachments to a sense of universal citizenship. Yet,

at the same time, these narratives suggest the risks of attaching personal identity to a political community. Women may experience self-division in the gap between personal ideals and political realities and are forced to revise their identities in response to revolutionary events. Nostalgia for a past golden age or investment in a utopian future potentially detaches individuals from the urgent political realities of the present. Their self-expression and personal desires may also be silenced by a corporate political agenda. However, while these narratives reveal the challenges of grounding public selfhood in particular attachments, they also suggest that a political identity based on sympathy and personal experience may allow individuated selfhood to find fulfilment in a universal embrace.

This chapter explores the personal narratives and revolutionary histories of Girondin supporters Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft and royalists Grace Dalrymple Elliott and Charlotte West. In their life writing, all four women writers articulate alternative models of female citizenship, engage in contemporary debates regarding national identity, contest the meanings of an affective politics, and aspire to a narrative mode that accommodates both personal experience and collective history. However, despite this common agenda, their different conceptions of political identity and social being, and the distinct historical moments in which they write, shape their self-representations. In their revolutionary writings, Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft identify themselves with the Girondin cause and imagine themselves as citizens of the world. Wollstonecraft initially grounds her politics in universal rationalism and adopts a stance of critical detachment and political spectatorship. Whereas, Williams advocates a sentimental ‘politics of the heart’ and locates herself within a community premised on sympathetic exchange. However, for both women, the violent transformations in the revolutionary landscape at the end of 1792 precipitate a re-examination of the personal and political implications of universal citizenship. These developments result in a crisis in their self-representations, registered in the mutation in the aesthetic form of their life writing. During this momentary loss of political faith, Williams and Wollstonecraft are attracted to the solipsistic persona of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s solitary wanderer. But ultimately they reject an inward retreat and acknowledge the psychological and social imperative for human connection, sustaining their political optimism in the face of revolutionary crisis. In their life writing they transform themselves from the solitary wanderer to the

Romantic woman writer, who is personally invested in her political polemic and embedded within a sympathetic textual community. Williams and Wollstonecraft suggest that the polite gentility of the sentimental form demanded radical revision in response to the pressures of a post-revolutionary age. However, for both writers, the discourse of sensibility enables them to imagine themselves simultaneously as the heroine of a political romance and as a socially connected subject.

Living and writing *in medias res*, Williams and Wollstonecraft struggle to avoid anachronism in their histories and attempt to create a narrative style that could respond to the radical contingency of events. Peter Fritzsche argues that the French Revolution ‘pulled contemporaries into a common orbit’, as individuals ‘consume and produce historical texts as a way to connect their personal ordeals with larger social narratives’.¹ For Williams and Wollstonecraft this process is a source of consolation that enables them to relocate themselves within a community, paradoxically characterised by displacement and loss. The inherent sociability of individual memory is suggested in Maurice Halbwachs’s claim that ‘in order to retrieve’ remembrances ‘we must tread the same path that others would have followed had they been in our position’.² In addition to enabling Williams and Wollstonecraft’s self-recovery and restoring their faith in human connection, collective memory is crucial to their revolutionary faith. The woman writer imagines herself as a repository for a past moment of political possibility and transmits the historical lessons of the Revolution through her autobiographical text. However, these narratives also suggest what is at stake in attaching the self to a collective political history. As Steven Blakemore argues, ‘for all those who had exuberantly promoted the Revolution and who had intimately linked their lives to its history, the rewriting of the Revolution ultimately entailed the rewriting of themselves.’³

In the second part of my study, I discuss the memoirs of royalist writers Grace Dalrymple Elliott and Charlotte West. I consider their marriage of personal and

¹ Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 39 and 8.

² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 53.

³ Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), pp. 236-37.

political identity and their deployment of a language of feeling in support of a conservative agenda. In her *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (written around 1801 to 1802), Elliott presents political history as a royalist self-vindication. She identifies herself as an aristocratic francophile, whose political identity is based on private affiliation and personal affection rather than a commitment to a set of abstract ideals. The *Journal* demonstrates the failure of an aristocratic politics of kinship to confront the implications of the reformist thinking expressed in the narratives of Williams and Wollstonecraft. However, it is also an acute analysis of the political impact of personal rivalries, group intrigue, and material interests, as Elliott presents individualised human nature as the engine of historical change. Her historiography pre-figures the work of the twentieth-century historian Lewis Namier, whose approach is encapsulated in his claim that with regard to political ideas ‘what matters most is the underlying emotions, the music, to which ideas are a mere libretto, often of very inferior quality’.⁴ Like Namier, Elliott takes the politics of the personal to an impoverished extreme. For in her emphasis on the particular she denies the power of universal ideals and detaches individual concerns from collective solidarities or social structures. Elliott’s connection between sexuality and political agency provides an alternative to universal rationalism and revives a model of political identity stifled by the Republic. However, this return to the feminised politics of the *ancien régime* suggests the obsolescence of Elliott’s self-image, as she locates herself within, and writes the collective history of, a cosmopolitan aristocratic community in decline.

In contrast to Elliott’s aristocratic politics and appeal to a former era, Charlotte West’s *A Ten Years’ Residence in France during the Severest Part of the Revolution* (1821) establishes the Protestant Englishwoman as the moral guardian of the nation into the nineteenth century. She imagines herself as the ‘female patriot’ on a mission of national and political salvation and converts her private history into a propagandist defence of the realm.⁵ However, there is a radical disjunction between West’s loyalist apostrophes to king and country that appear to be written by conservative committee and the breathless voice of the counter-revolutionary heroine, who revels in her

⁴ Lewis Namier, *Personalities and Powers* (London: Hamilton, 1955), p. 4.

⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; repr. 2005), p. 261.

memories of the liberations of the 1790s in the cloistered atmosphere of the 1820s. This tension is reminiscent of the attempts of Mary Fletcher, Mary Tooth, and Elizabeth Fox to shape a narrative of personal experience into a communal history. Therefore, Elliott empties the Revolution of its intellectual and social content and rewrites a universal democratic struggle as a family drama. West, on the other hand, fashions her experience into a corporate conservative history and sacrifices self-articulation to the propagandist demands of a political community. Halbwachs suggests that 'we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated'.⁶ The life writing of Williams, Wollstonecraft, Elliott, and West reveals the complexity of this 'continual relationship' in which identity is a compound of continuity and revision, individual recollection is an aspect of collective memory, and personal experience is understood as a part of public history.

Citizens of the world, aristocratic francophiles, and English patriots: A politics of the heart, the boudoir, and the nation

Critical discussion of British women writers in the French Revolution tends to focus on literary figures known for their political radicalism, such as Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft, rather than royalist or conservative writers, such as Grace Dalrymple Elliott and Charlotte West.⁷ Most pertinent to this study is the fascinating body of work exploring the reformist political identities of Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft and their engagements with the discourses of rationalism, sensibility, and nationalism. As Stephen Behrendt argues, the tradition of the 'Norman yoke' that advocated a return to an Anglo-Saxon ideal of democracy was central to the rhetoric of the radical movement in the 1790s. However, this political language was inhospitable to women radicals, as 'the mythic past offered no golden age during

⁶ Halbwachs, p. 47.

⁷ For a discussion of the role of conservative women writers in the revolutionary debate, see Steven Blakemore, 'Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's *Letters to Helen Maria Williams*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36 (1996), 673-91; Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University New York, 2001); and Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 51-56.

which they had possessed greater prerogative'.⁸ In addition, the Whig model of an oppositional politics of patriotism and property ownership potentially confined women radicals to the depoliticised sphere they sought to escape. However, as Linda Colley and Anna Clark argue, Thomas Paine's iconoclastic claim that the ideal political order must be invented in the present rather than revived from the past, and his commitment to a model of citizenship based on universal rationalism rather than property, was attractive to many women reformers.⁹

Mark Philps argues that radicalism was 'a developing political practice whose principles and ideological commitments are as much forged in the struggle as they are fetched from the arsenal and brought to it'.¹⁰ This insight is particularly suggestive for considering the impact of revolutionary citizenship on Williams and Wollstonecraft's public personae and rhetorical strategies. In her writing, Wollstonecraft initially embraces a politics premised on rationalism and critical detachment. However, in the aftermath of Revolution she modifies her position, uniting reason and feeling, observation and emotion. In contrast, Williams rejects a discourse of rationalism from the outset and combines the universal values of reform with the 'rococo, "precious" or particularist' aesthetic of French political culture, embodied by the salon.¹¹ Joan Landes connects 'the genesis of feminism to the fall of the politically influential women of the absolutist court and salon of Old Regime France'.¹² For Landes, the emergence of voices such as Wollstonecraft's is dependent upon the suppression of figures such as Elliott, who embody the corruptions of the past in a conflation of aristocratic sexuality and political agency. Therefore, as an individual who must be silenced, Elliott highlights the sexual politics of radicalism that potentially disguises its masculinism in an androgynous language of universal reason.

⁸ Stephen C. Behrendt, 'British Women Poets and the Reverberations of Radicalism in the 1790s', in *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press*, ed. by Stephen C. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 83-102 (p. 85).

⁹ Colley, p. 336; and Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 141.

¹⁰ Mark Philp, 'The Fragmented Ideology of Reform', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. by Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 50-77 (p. 53).

¹¹ Jacqueline LeBlanc, 'Politics and Commercial Sensibility in Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France*', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 21 (1997), 26-44; and Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 125.

¹² Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 1.

As Adriana Craciun's discussion of the 'cosmopolitan feminism' of British women radicals reveals, female political selfhood was shaped by conceptions of national identity. Craciun suggests that the citizen of the world was an oppositional stance that signalled an individual's membership of a political community that was based on common humanity rather than kinship, family, or the nation.¹³ This ethos of trans-national exchange, which presents a civic alternative to the universal evangelism of Quaker and Methodist women writers, was central to rational dissent and the political milieu of the Girondins with whom Williams and Wollstonecraft were strongly associated. The Girondin circle were a collective of likeminded thinkers, who broadly stood for democratic revolution, liberal government, and greater toleration, and who differed in style and temperament from the more radical Jacobins.¹⁴ As David Erdman's history of this group reveals, cross-Channel projects such as the *Universal Patriot* of 1790 and the British Club of 1792 established communal belonging on the basis of shared principles, collective sympathies, and universal citizenship.¹⁵ For, as Dena Goodman argues, the 'Republic of Letters' was 'marked by its epistolary relations and its values of reciprocity and exchange'.¹⁶ Elliott's aristocratic francophilia and her potentially Catholic and Jacobite origins meant that she shared this commitment to cosmopolitanism, but she remained opposed to universal reform. Her position reinforces Robin Eagles's argument that francophilia was a powerful force within the aristocracy at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ In contrast, West rejected the internationalism of Williams, Wollstonecraft, and Elliott. Instead, she adhered to a model of British national identity grounded in Protestantism and francophobia and understood her politics as an expression of her faith.¹⁸

In addition to participating in contemporary debates regarding political and national identity, in their life writing these women also contest the meaning of a politics of feeling. John Barrell argues that during the 1790s the language of sentiment shaped

¹³ Craciun, *Citizens*, pp. 6 and 12.

¹⁴ Gary Kates, *The 'Cercle Social', the Girondins, and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 8-9.

¹⁵ David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790-1793* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 114.

¹⁶ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 83.

¹⁷ Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748-1815* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 3-5.

¹⁸ This model is consistent with Linda Colley's analysis of national identity in *Britons*.

both conservative and radical responses to the Revolution.¹⁹ Charlotte West's loyalist defence of the realm is expressed in these terms. She imagines social cohesion on the basis of kinship and understands the relationship between the King and his subjects as a combination of patriarchal protection and paternal loyalty. Despite their ideological differences, Williams and Wollstonecraft share West's investment in feeling. Wollstonecraft encapsulates this ideal marriage of political and personal selfhood in her insight that 'we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel' and Williams claims that 'my political creed is entirely an affair of the heart'.²⁰ Elizabeth Bohls argues that Williams's 'politics of the heart' is an attempt to reclaim 'the rhetorical turf of particularism' for the liberal side.²¹ This effort to recuperate universal benevolence from association with a heartless rejection of local sympathies is frequently articulated by both Williams and Wollstonecraft through their textual engagements with Rousseau. There is a wide range of work on Rousseau's role as a literary mentor for women writers. Like many of their contemporaries, Williams and Wollstonecraft adopt his conception of autobiography as 'a radical process of self-affirmation and self "re-creation"'²², interpret and articulate revolutionary politics in terms of his sentimental plots²³, and identify with his authorial persona of the *Reveries*.²⁴ However, I argue that in rewriting Rousseau and resisting an isolated retreat into the realms of the imagination and nature, Williams and Wollstonecraft sustain their commitment to social transformation and reclaim the discourse of sentiment for the revolutionary cause.

¹⁹ John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 79-86.

²⁰ *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), VI, 236-364 (p. 325); and Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), p. 66.

²¹ Bohls, p. 126.

²² Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 309.

²³ Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 4.

²⁴ Nancy Yousef, 'Wollstonecraft, Rousseau and the Revision of Romantic Subjectivity', *Studies in Romanticism*, 38 (1999), 537-57.

Helen Maria Williams and the Stages of the French Revolution: *Letters from France* (1790-1796)

Helen Maria Williams maintained a lifelong commitment to the principles of the French Revolution and the values of the Girondins, articulated in thirteen volumes of French history covering the period 1790 to 1819. In the *Letters from France*, published in eight instalments from 1790 to 1796, Williams confirms her faith in a politics of the heart and creates a series of visual spectacles and sentimental narratives in which individual and universal sympathy are in unison. However, this unified aesthetic of the revolutionary stage fragments and distorts in her volumes from 1792 onwards that describe the violence and factionalism of the Terror. She experiences a crisis of faith in human relationships and universal citizenship. However, despite her initial attraction, she ultimately rejects a Rousseauvian retreat into rural solitude or an imagined golden age and dismisses introspection in favour of social engagement and political optimism. She imagines alternative repositories for the spirit of Revolution, such as the family and the military, and writes herself into a community of revolutionary martyrs, prisoners, and mythologized Girondins. Her faith in the spectacle is replaced by a belief in print culture, textual exchange, and the written word, as she invests historical narratives and a community of future readers with the potential to revive revolutionary principles. Williams's self-conception as the guardian of a collective political mythology is reminiscent of the self-definitions of Mary Tooth and Elizabeth Fox. However, she is never the 'survivor' defined by her belatedness. For, like Ann Freeman and Mary Robinson, she identifies with a community that her life writing will help to create. Understood in these terms, Williams's ongoing attempts to rewrite the events of the 1790s and shape the legacy of Revolution is an act of self-revision and a political intervention. For Williams suggests that personal memory is inscribed on the heart of the woman writer and transmitted to her readership through text.

Poet of sensibility and revolutionary historian

Helen Maria Williams's engagement with a politics of sensibility and a feminised aesthetic is the focus of recent studies by Elizabeth Bohls, Mary Favret, Chris Jones,

Vivien Jones, Angela Keane, Deborah Kennedy, and Gary Kelly.²⁵ This work demonstrates Williams's ability to liberate the political potential of sensibility and establish the sentimental form as a mode of historical analysis. In addition, it reveals her attraction to the French political culture of the salon that, like her *Letters*, 'defies any careful separation of interior and exterior, private and public, sentimental and political'.²⁶ Building on this research, I explore Williams's politicisation of autobiography and collective memory and consider her attempts to attach herself to a universal community through human sympathy. My argument that Williams's sentimental aesthetic and conception of revolutionary community undergo radical revision during the 1790s draws on the work of Steven Blakemore and Mary Favret.²⁷ However, while Williams's life writing articulates a political coming of age, her self-representation and personal and political identity are characterised by continuity and progression.

Williams was born into a family of Protestant dissenters in 1761. She spent her childhood in Berwick-upon-Tweed, but on her relocation to London in 1781 she was introduced into literary society through her friendship with the prominent dissenting minister and man of letters Andrew Kippis.²⁸ She published her first work *Edwin and Eltruda* in 1782 and confirmed her significance as a poet of sensibility in 1786 with her collected works, *Poems*. In this volume she devoted herself 'To Sensibility', declaring that 'no cold exemption from her pain / I ever wish'd to know'.²⁹ Gary Kelly's analysis of the work's fifteen hundred subscribers that included 'artists, writers, intellectuals, Dissenting ministers and Anglican churchmen, noblemen, the Prince of Wales, Scots, and women writers' demonstrates the heterogeneity of Williams's circle.³⁰ In contrast to Robinson's isolated experience in the 1790s,

²⁵ Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993); Vivien Jones, 'Women Writing Revolution: Narratives of History and Sexuality in Wollstonecraft and Williams', in *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832*, ed. by Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 178-99; Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).

²⁶ Mary Favret, 'Spectatrice as Spectacle: Helen Maria Williams At Home in the Revolution', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (1993), 273-95 (p. 276).

²⁷ Favret, *Correspondence*, pp. 88-95; and Blakemore, *Crisis*, pp. 215-35.

²⁸ Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, pp. 30-31.

²⁹ *Poems by Helen Maria Williams*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Cadell, 1786). I, 21.

³⁰ Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, pp. 31-32.

Williams's text is a testament to the diverse sociability of the literary culture of the 1780s and the universalising capacities of sentimental discourse.

In the opening volume of her *Letters from France*, Williams describes herself in familiar terms. She adopts the role of the woman of feeling, commenting that 'my political creed is entirely an affair of the heart' (I, 1, 66).³¹ This pose is consistent with her anti-war and abolitionist poetry of the 1780s that expresses reformist values in a sentimental mode. Mary Wollstonecraft's response to the *Letters from France* in the *Analytical Review* highlights this continuity. She comments that the work 'confirmed the very favourable opinion we have entertained of the goodness of the writer's heart' as her reflections are 'truly feminine' and coloured by an 'air of sincerity'.³² Williams claims that the *Letters* represent a movement 'from the annals of imagination to the records of politics; from the poetry to the prose of human life' (I, 1, 195). But in the multi-generic form of her text the distinction is never sustained and she establishes sensibility as a foundation for citizenship and a mode of political participation available to both sexes. Despite her pose of feminine modesty, Williams repeatedly insists on the superiority of the perceptions of the heart to a purely rational politics:

However dull the faculties of my head, I can assure you, that when a proposition is addressed to my heart, I have some quickness of perception. I can then decide, in one moment, points upon which philosophers and legislators have differed in all ages. (I, 1, 195-96)

The revolutionary historian may defend herself from the charge of impropriety by stressing her identity as a woman of feeling, but the sentimental poet is also a politically engaged social commentator.

³¹ The first volume was entitled the *Letters Written in France, in the Summer of 1790, to a Friend in England* (London: T. Cadell, 1790). Subsequent volumes were published in 1791, 1793 (2 volumes), 1795 (2 volumes), and 1796 (2 volumes). All eight volumes are reprinted in *Letters from France 1790-96*, ed. by Janet Todd, 2 vols (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975). In this section, references to the *Letters from France* are given after quotations in the text and indicate the reprint volume first, followed by the original volume number and page number.

³² *Contributions to the Analytical Review 1788-1797*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (see Todd and Butler, above), VII, 322.

The revolutionary spectacle and the sentimental romance

Williams's *Letters* are at once an epistolary history and a political intervention that explore the relationship between individual and universal sympathy and consider the intersections between private experience and public events. She suggests that citizenship is founded on universal benevolence and presents a challenge to loyalist rhetoric in her claim that it is futile to look for 'particular sympathy from those who have no feelings of general philanthropy' (I, 1, 25). She opens her correspondence with a euphoric account of the Festival of the Federation of 4 July 1790:

Oh, no! this was not a time in which the distinctions of country were remembered. It was the triumph of human kind; it was man asserting the noblest privilege of his nature; and it required but the common feelings of humanity, to become in that moment a citizen of the world. For myself, I acknowledge that my heart caught with enthusiasm the general sympathy; my eyes were filled with tears. (I, 1, 14)

General sympathy is 'caught from heart to heart' (I, 1, 62) in an associative chain that incorporates the British reader within this international sentimental community forged through the tears of the woman writer.³³ Mona Ozouf echoes Williams's interpretation, suggesting that 'the festival celebrated the passage from the private to the public' and allowed 'the mingling of citizens delighting in the spectacle of one another and the perfect accord of hearts'.³⁴ This imagery is reminiscent of Mary Fletcher's representation of her Methodist faith as the rivers that 'flow from heart to heart'.³⁵ Williams relives the moment of connective transformation and charts her 'conversion' into a universal citizen located within a shared political faith. The form of the *Letters* embodies this fusion, for in her reflections on the sentimental narrative of the du Fossés (that is recreated in her *Letters*) Williams comments, 'I blend the feelings of private friendship with my sympathy in public blessings' (I, 1, 71-72). In this golden age, 'private friendship' and 'public blessings', spectacles and sentimental narratives, and the French crowd and the woman writer are in unison.

In the *Letters*, Williams aspires to a universal politics that 'throws a line of connexion across the divided world' (I, 1, 222). Her renowned salon on the Rue Helvétius, where

³³ Favret, 'Spectatrice', pp. 280-82.

³⁴ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 54.

³⁵ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', John Rylands Library, Fletcher-Tooth Collection, Box 23, MS I, 35.

she hosted leading British, American, and French radicals such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, embodied this ideal. She was closely connected with members of the British Club, which consisted of 'The Friends of the Rights of Man associated at Paris' and concerned itself with support for the Revolution in Britain.³⁶ As a consequence, Williams was able to understand herself as a participant 'in an international, cosmopolitan conversation about the moral and political fate of Europe'.³⁷ Williams identified with the Girondin cause and maintained enduring friendships with prominent members of the group, including Madame Roland, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and Pierre Vergniaud. Her visits to France in 1790 and 1791 coincided with Girondin ascendancy, evident in Brissot's presidency of the Jacobin Club and the group's dominance in the Legislative Assembly and National Convention.

The second instalment of Williams's *Letters* generally reflects this moment of optimism, as she recalls that she 'was at the Jacobins when the English, French, and American colours, fastened together with bands of laurel and national ribbon, were placed in the hall' (I, 2, 112). She locates herself at the centre of this trans-national community united by revolutionary spirit and translates the achievements of the Jacobin Club into universal terms. However, despite the mood of celebration, there are contradictions within Williams's unified vision. She doubts her reader's capacity for universal sympathy, noting that 'while we contemplate the deliverance of millions with a sublime emotion of wonder and exultation, the tears of tenderness, the throbbings of sympathy, are reserved for the moment when we select one happy family from the great national groupe' (I, 2, 1-2). From 1791 to 1792 political factionalism, economic crisis, *émigré* plots, provincial resistance, and war with Austria threatened revolutionary progress. In response, Williams suggests that the Revolution is 'viewed too near' by the present but will be perceived clearly by posterity. She compares this process to the way 'we gaze at a sublime landscape, of which the general effect is great and noble, and where some little points of asperity, some minute deformities, are lost in the overwhelming majesty of the whole' (I, 2, 22-23). Williams's contradictory desire to select an individual from the crowd and yet

³⁶ Erdman, pp. 226-43.

³⁷ Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke, 'British Women Writers and the French Revolution', in *Rebellious Hearts* (see Craciun and Lokke, above), pp. 3-30 (p. 16).

also gaze from a distance suggests the difficulties of sustaining a politics and an aesthetics that could reconcile the particular and the universal. She therefore anticipates the imminent crisis in her self-representation that followed her permanent relocation to France in August 1792.

'Such a war of opinion'

For Williams, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy from 1789 to 1791 was the 'golden age of the French revolution' (I, 4, 164). However, 1792 to 1793 that was marked by the September massacres, the execution of Louis XVI, France's declaration of war against Britain, the formation of the Committee of Public Safety, and the overthrow of the Girondins by the Jacobins in the Convention was 'the IRON AGE' (I, 4, 237).³⁸ Williams's permanent residence in France began at a transitional moment, around the time of the attack on the Tuileries on 10 August 1792 that resulted in the creation of the Republic and a shift in revolutionary style from Girondin to Jacobin. In her *Letters* from 1792 onwards, Williams presents herself amid 'such a war of opinion, and indeed so great a contradiction as to facts, that it is impossible at present to trace any true or even probable history of the causes of such an inundation of distress' (I, 4, 82). The woman writer's sentimental correspondence is juxtaposed with the military reports and political commentary of her male collaborators, identified by Janet Todd as John Hurford Stone and Thomas Christie.³⁹ Peter Fritzsche suggests that from the French Revolution onwards 'history would be contemplated from the standpoint of epistemological uncertainty, which made historical narratives less authoritative, but also more interesting and many-sided'.⁴⁰ This process of fragmentation is evident in the *Letters*, as they mutate from staged tableaux and sentimental romance to dialogue, conversation, and correspondence.⁴¹ In the aftermath of the September massacres, Williams presents the people of Paris as 'the dangerous instruments of party rage and faction' and 'pusillanimous witnesses', who are 'sunk in a state of complete stupefaction' (I, 3, 19). However, in the

³⁸ Williams's 'periodization' of the French Revolution, separating 'a moderate and constructive early phase' from the 'more radical and violent period that followed', is consistent with the view of twentieth-century liberal historians. Gary Kates, *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*, ed. by Gary Kates (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 9.

³⁹ Janet Todd, 'Introduction', *Letters from France*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Fritzsche, p. 6.

⁴¹ Favret, *Correspondence*, p. 86.

democracy of voices and the community forged through text in the third and fourth volumes, Williams attempts to imagine collectivity along alternative lines from the stupefied crowds that are coerced into anti-democratic conformity through spectacle.

Interwoven within the multiple narrative strands of these volumes is Williams's account of the execution of Louis XVI. This event presents an impossible challenge to a politics of the heart, as the demands of particular sympathy and universal reform cannot be reconciled. In a letter to Hester Thrale Piozzi, written on the second day of the King's trial 12 December 1792, Williams reveals the conflicts of her position:

I never took so little interest in politics as I have done lately – I have been too sick and too sorrowful to have the power of considering whether monarchies or republics are best – and at present all my feelings are on the side of Lewis the sixteenth whom whether he be guilty or innocent we know to be unfortunate, which gives him a sufficient claim to pity.⁴²

Williams initially attempts to resolve this impasse in her published correspondence. In a letter dated 25 January 1793 (four days after the King's execution), she boldly asserts that 'when we consider the importance which this event may have in its consequences, not only to this country, but to all Europe, we lose sight of the individual sufferer, to meditate upon the destiny of mankind' (I, 3, 2). However, this perspective is unsustainable and by 10 February 1793 her tone is radically altered in her visualisation of the royal family at the last interview:

Alas! when imagination pictured the anguish of such an interview, it was not necessary to look back upon the former elevation of the sufferer, in order to pity the gloomy transition in his fate! [...] It was enough to consider this unfortunate person as a man, a husband, a father! (I, 4, 29)

John Barrell argues that the sentimental language deployed in representations of Louis's death undermined radical attempts to separate the political significance from the private tragedy, as regicide inevitably became figured as parricide.⁴³ Foregrounding the King's humanity and denigrating his sacred status produces a crisis for Williams. Her sentimental politics and epistolary history are founded on the intimate connection between private experience and public affairs, sympathetic imagination and rational contemplation. Over a decade later, Williams would revisit this tension in the introduction to her luckless edition of *The Political and*

⁴²Helen Maria Williams, letter to Hester Thrale Piozzi, 12 December 1792, John Rylands Library, Manchester. Quoted in Kennedy, *Revolution*, p. 93.

⁴³Barrell, p. 81.

Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth (1803).⁴⁴ However, at this distance, Williams attains a degree of resolution. She argues that Louis XVI's political crimes were the consequence of his virtues as 'a man, a husband, a father', since it was 'his conjugal attachment' that 'led him into the most fatal errors'.⁴⁵

However, despite the challenge of the King's death, the true moment of the Revolution's 'fall' for Williams was the overthrow of the Girondin by the Jacobins in the Convention from 31 May to 2 June 1793.⁴⁶ By the end of 1793 many of Williams's political circle had fallen victim to the guillotine, including Madame Roland, Brissot, and Vergniaud. On 12 October she was arrested under the Law of Suspects and imprisoned for several months. During this period, women's status within the Republic was in decline more generally, evident in the ban on women's political clubs and popular societies in October 1793 and symbolised by the replacement of the feminine 'Liberty' with the masculine 'Hercules' on the state seal in the following month.⁴⁷ In response to the Committee of Public Safety's decree of April 1794 that required all foreigners to leave Paris, Williams moved to a village near Versailles. She took flight to Switzerland around June with her lover John Hurford Stone, who was an entrepreneur intimately involved with radical politics on either side of the Channel.⁴⁸ Their relationship continued until Stone's death in 1818 and was understood by Williams as 'a sacred sentiment, a tie which death only could dissolve'.⁴⁹ She returned with Stone to Paris after the fall of Robespierre and resumed her history, completing the final four volumes from 1795 to 1796.

⁴⁴ Both royalists and Bonapartists attacked the work and several years after publication it was discovered that the letters Williams had been sold were forgeries. See Kennedy, *Revolution*, pp. 180-81.

⁴⁵ Helen Maria Williams, *The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth; with Observations on Each Letter*, 3 vols (London: G. and J. Robinson, 1803), III, 61.

⁴⁶ Deborah Kennedy, 'Spectacle of the Guillotine: Helen Maria Williams and the Reign of Terror', *Philological Quarterly*, 73 (1994), 95-113 (p. 98).

⁴⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 47-48; and Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 92-119.

⁴⁸ Erdman, pp. 236-37.

⁴⁹ Helen Maria Williams, letter to William Shepherd, c. 1818, Harris Manchester College, Oxford. Quoted in Kennedy, *Revolution*, p. 194.

'The idea of social happiness'

Writing in a moment of relative safety in 1795, Williams suggests that her experience of violence, imprisonment, and exile from 1793 to 1794 produces a crisis of faith in human connection and revolutionary society. In her flight to Switzerland, Williams presents herself as a social exile. She travels 'with a heart almost broken by the crimes I had witnessed' and laments that the majority of her correspondents in England 'returned no answers to my letters' (II, V, 174-76). She reveals her attraction to the persona of the Rousseauvian solitary wanderer, claiming that on her return to Paris:

How I envied the peasant his lonely hut! for I had now almost lost the idea of social happiness. My disturbed imagination divided the communities of men but into two classes, the oppressor and the oppressed; and peace seemed only to exist with solitude. (II, 6, 4)

Williams admits in retrospect that she 'had now almost lost the idea of social happiness'. But by implication she is writing in a later moment of recovery from which she critiques a retreat into solipsism. In a private letter to Ruth Barlow of April 1794, written shortly prior to her departure for Switzerland, Williams seems to desire a life liberated from the pain of attachment. However, the fantasy is barely expressed before she recognises her need for interdependence, confessing, 'I should be like Sterne I believe, if I found nothing else to attach myself too, I would find some favourite tree or other to admire & worship tho' I could not animate it'.⁵⁰

Williams replicates this attempt to discover alternative modes of sympathetic connection in her *Letters*, abandoning the spectacle of the crowd in favour of precious communities understood as repositories for the spirit of Revolution. She portrays Jacques-Louis David's 'Festival of the Supreme Being' of 8 June 1794 as a corrupt and orchestrated display where 'by David's command, the mothers are to embrace their daughters – at that, the fathers are to clasp their sons' (II, 6, 86). However, as Gary Kelly and Angela Keane argue, in the community of mourners and martyrs of the guillotine Williams finds an expression of revolutionary society.⁵¹ She suggests that 'the love of public virtue' 'is heard in the sighs of general mourning; it speaks in the tears of the widow and the orphan' (II, V, 258). Elsewhere, Williams claims that

⁵⁰ Helen Maria Williams, *Four New Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen M. Williams*, ed. by Benjamin P. Kurtz and Carrie C. Autrey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937), p. 45.

⁵¹ Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, p. 62; and Keane, pp. 67-68.

the military ‘alone appear to have been the true representatives of the French nation, and every family in France could boast of having a deputy upon the frontier’ (II, 8, 206). Her comments are consistent with Peter Fritzsche’s argument that the soldier’s ability to mirror the suffering and displacement of his contemporaries established him as ‘a representative of “everyman”’ at the end of the eighteenth century.⁵²

In addition to this idealised portrait of the military, Williams presents the revolutionary prison as a utopian community based on sentiment, salon sociability, and universal citizenship. Mary Favret argues that for Williams the prison ‘offers the possibility of a state institution constituted in terms of affective relationships’, while Parisian sociability is revived in confinement.⁵³ Williams comments that ‘the courtyard of the Luxembourg, the convent of St. Lazare, and some other prisons, exhibited of an evening almost as much brilliancy and gaiety as the Thuilleries or the Champs Elisées’ (II, 6, 96). However, she also invests the prison with the revolutionary values lacking outside its walls. She notes that ‘one broom, which was the property of a countess, was used by twenty delicate hands’ (II, 5, 20-21), although the ‘delicate hands’ reveal the class bias of her ideal. Judith Scheffler suggests that in the narratives of male Romantic writers the French prison represents a transcendent space that frees the artist from social constraint.⁵⁴ This ideal finds an echo in Mary Robinson’s portrayal of the Fleet prison as the poet’s garret in her *Memoirs*. However, in Williams’s sentimental community human ties are foregrounded and the universal stage is abandoned for the intimate circle that is created out of the divisive violence of faction.

‘The good will remain written in brass’

Williams’s investment in alternative communities after 1793 coexists with a revision of her political identity. She adopts a more ‘overtly partisan position’ and imagines herself as the posthumous defender of the collective memory of the Girondin.⁵⁵ The Jacobins are no longer the ‘best guardians’ of the ‘infant liberty’ (I, 2, 110-11), but

⁵² Fritzsche, pp. 169-70.

⁵³ Favret, ‘Spectatrice’, p. 292.

⁵⁴ Judith Scheffler, ‘Romantic Women Writing on Imprisonment and Prison Reform’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 19 (1988), 99-103 (p. 99).

⁵⁵ Kennedy, ‘Guillotine’, p. 96.

become a means to exorcise the passing evils of Revolution. They are portrayed as ‘those sanguinary and ambitious men who passed along the revolutionary horizon like baneful meteors’ (II, 6, 78). In contrast, the Girondin are imagined as ‘a radiant constellation in the zone of freedom’ and the true representatives of a revolutionary spirit that will endure, as Williams claims that ‘history will judge between Brissot and Robespierre’ (II, 6, 78). In her role as Girondin historian, Williams promotes their collective self-representation as ‘illustrious martyrs’ (II, 6, 77). She presents Madame Roland as a heroic fusion of masculine republican stoicism and feminine sensibility, pictured in her prison cell reading Plutarch while she weeps for her husband and her child.⁵⁶

Williams presents anecdotes, character sketches, and conversations, and frames her narrative with appendices that include Madame Roland’s trial defence and Brissot’s reflections on Jean-Paul Marat.⁵⁷ Rather than a series of conflicting fragments or heterogeneous voices, these interlocutors confirm Williams’s presentation of the Girondin in the main body of the *Letters*. Deborah Kennedy stresses the commercial motivations for Williams’s addendums.⁵⁸ However, while the literary marketplace is undoubtedly a preoccupation for Williams, these transcriptions and anecdotes might also be understood as an attempt to reconstitute her social circle in a moment of personal and political crisis. Methodist Mary Tooth attaches herself to a cross-generational community by acting as the amanuensis of a spiritual fellowship. Williams recreates the decimated Republic of Letters in the imaginative and textual realm, positioning herself within a circle of words that stands in for a fragmented political community.

This textual collaboration displaces Williams’s connection to the French people experienced at the Festival of the Federation. In addition, her preoccupation with memory substitutes for her earlier faith in the transcendent, transforming moment. The relationship between readers and writers becomes the primary mode of sympathetic exchange and the source of Williams’s political optimism. She finds consolation in the hope that ‘principles are eternal: circumstances only change. – The

⁵⁶ Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 147.

⁵⁷ Keane, pp. 73-74.

⁵⁸ Kennedy, ‘Guillotine’, p. 106.

good will remain written in brass – the evil will evaporate like water’ (I, 4, 150). In the course of the *Letters*, an irreparable breach opens up between the perspective of the spectator and the view of posterity. Those like the narrator ‘who have been spectators of the cruel conflict’ are unable to consider “‘all partial evil as universal good’” (II, 6, 117). Nevertheless, writing connects a past moment and a future political state, as Williams’s text relates the lessons of the Revolution and reveals ‘how to avoid the rocks on which Liberty has been nearly wrecked’ (II, 6, 213). In the revolutionary aftermath, Williams becomes a repository for the political ideals and the historical lessons of the 1790s that she transmits to a future community of readers through her autobiographical reflections.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘Cool Eye of Observation’ and the Political Romance of the French Revolution

Helen Maria Williams’s fluid sense of self makes possible a continuous narrative of revolutionary politics. She understands her political history as a development of her sentimental poetry and grounds her enduring revolutionary optimism in emotional constancy. In contrast, for Mary Wollstonecraft the French Revolution results in a violent revision of her self-image as a disinterested spectator and challenges her impulse to separate her public persona as the woman of letters from the woman of feeling in her private correspondence. Wollstonecraft’s early writings reveal her attraction to rational detachment and the pleasures of spectatorship, but from 1793 the personal and public realm become desperately intertwined. The death of Louis XVI results in her self-recrimination for intellectually underwriting the act of regicide and, following the collapse of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, romantic disappointment stands in metonymic relation to political disillusionment. However, Wollstonecraft experiences a temporary recovery in Scandinavia from the political and personal heartbreak she suffered in France, in a journey comparable to Williams’s healing retreat to Switzerland in 1794. In *A Short Residence* (1796), Wollstonecraft evokes the solipsistic personae of the Rousseauvian wanderer, cool observer, and sentimental heroine that had dominated her past self-conception. However, in a northern landscape, she abandons this cast of characters and adopts the role of the revolutionary heroine and Romantic woman writer.

In contrast to Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Steele's fictional identifications, Wollstonecraft's relationship to the discourse of sensibility and the image of the sentimental heroine is highly ambivalent. In her personal correspondence of the 1780s, Wollstonecraft casts herself as the disciple of sensibility.⁵⁹ However, as Cora Kaplan argues, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Wollstonecraft rejects false sentiment and negatively portrays fiction, fantasy, and femininity.⁶⁰ In her wide-ranging analysis of Wollstonecraft's literary and philosophical works, Barbara Taylor understands this negative alignment as 'only part of the story' and suggests that Wollstonecraft regards the fantasising mind as both corrupting and generative.⁶¹ Taylor's extension of the argument is particularly suggestive for reading *A Short Residence*, in which Wollstonecraft articulates her ideal of a revolutionary heroine in order to liberate herself from an alternative, debilitating fiction. This reading is consistent with Syndy McMillen Conger and Mitzi Myers's claim that in the final years of her life Wollstonecraft rewrites the sentimental script in her own image and transforms 'feminine romance to female Romanticism'.⁶²

In their life writing, Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Steele shape their lives into a continuous history, engage with their disreputable pasts, and cast themselves as protagonists in their own sentimental romance. Whereas, in *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft privileges writing to the moment over fictional frameworks, favours continuous self-revision over narrative coherence, and rejects retrospective vindication for veiled self-disclosure. Catherine Parke argues that 'the idea of the heroine was throughout her career as attractive to her as it was troubling'.⁶³ Like Williams, Wollstonecraft fashions an image of a revolutionary heroine whose identity is grounded in sympathetic connection, social engagement, and empowering female identifications rather than romantic retreat or sentimental victimhood. In the process, she imagines a politics premised on an enabling fusion of particular experience and

⁵⁹ Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 102-04.

⁶⁰ Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 121-25.

⁶¹ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 72.

⁶² Syndy McMillen Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), pp. 145-59; and Mitzi Myers, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written ... in Sweden*: Toward Romantic Autobiography', in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Roseann Runte (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), VIII, 165-85 (p. 168).

⁶³ Catherine N. Parke, 'What Kind of Heroine is Mary Wollstonecraft?', in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. by Syndy McMillen Conger (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 103-19 (p. 105).

personal investment rather than rational detachment. Wollstonecraft therefore seems to liberate the political potential of the heroine of sensibility in her final works. However, following the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (1798), her legacy became subject to the dangers of the form. Godwin's claim that Wollstonecraft's revolutionary impact is the result of her lived oppositional politics echoes her self-conception as the heroine of a political history in *A Short Residence*. But nonetheless, the potential for the intimate portrait of a 'female Werter' to compromise our engagement with the feminist philosopher testifies to the risks as well as the possibilities of the role of revolutionary subject.⁶⁴

'A piece of still life', 'a sojourner in a strange land', and 'the first of a new genus'

In her personal correspondence of the 1770s and 1780s, Wollstonecraft cultivates a series of personae premised on detachment, social exile, and an acute sensibility. Janet Todd argues that the letters often 'seem more like a diary than correspondence, a communion with the self or perhaps a self-created other', as Wollstonecraft experiments with a range of identities in order to give authentic expression to her inner life.⁶⁵ The letters depicting Wollstonecraft's experiences as a lady's companion in Bath and Windsor at the end of the 1770s suggest that a combination of religious piety, pride in her sensibility, and an ability to construct herself in opposition to fashionable society enables Wollstonecraft to manage her social dislocation. Her antipathy to her surroundings falls short of Quaker Priscilla Hannah Gurney's characterisation of her arrival in Bath as 'an introduction into evils'.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft establishes her opposition through passive withdrawal and detached observation, noting in a letter to Jane Arden in 1779 that amid the 'bustle' of Bath, 'I am quite a piece of still life'.⁶⁷ Writing from Windsor in 1781 she asserts that she is 'only a spectator' (p. 28), notably investing the former image of the 'still life' with the power of vision. However, in a subsequent letter, recounting the gossip from Windsor

⁶⁴ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'*, ed. by Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 242.

⁶⁵ Janet Todd, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 7-23 (p. 9).

⁶⁶ Priscilla Hannah Gurney, *Memoir of the Life and Religious Experience of Priscilla Hannah Gurney* (Bristol: J. Chilcott, 1834), p. 21.

⁶⁷ *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 21. In this section, further references to the *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* are given after quotations in the text.

at a time when Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Fox, and Grace Dalrymple Elliott were all objects of the Prince of Wales's wavering affections, Wollstonecraft inserts a revealing self-portrait into her postscript:

I have put so much water in my ink, I am afraid you will not be able to read my faint characters, and besides my candle gives such a dreadful light. – I am just going to sup *solus* on a bunch of grapes, and a bread crust; - I'll drink your health in pure water. (p. 35)

Wollstonecraft stresses her abstemious lifestyle and imagines that her 'faint characters' (both personal and textual) are barely impressed on the world, as she finds solace in her garret with a pen in her hand. In this opposition between the woman writer and the woman of fashion the distance between Robinson and Wollstonecraft seems insurmountable. But it is a testament to Robinson's capacity for self-reinvention that by 1796 Wollstonecraft was writing to her as a fellow woman of letters and dining at her home (p. 387).

Wollstonecraft's self-construction as the passive observer and faint character in her letters presents a stark contrast to her active intervention in the lives of her friends and family. Her impulse to absorb others, especially her sisters, into the realms of her personal fantasy is evident in her portrayal of the elopement of her sister Eliza at the end of 1783.⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft imagines the event as a drama in which she has temporarily seized 'centre stage', as Janet Todd expresses it.⁶⁹ She casts herself as the '*shameful incendiary*' (p. 47) and demonstrates little sympathy for Eliza, who 'bit her *wedding ring* to pieces' (p. 43) during the escape. Wollstonecraft's aspiration for an independent female community found expression in the schools she established in Islington and Newington Green in 1784, with her sisters Everina and Eliza and her beloved friend Fanny Blood. However, this precarious autonomy collapsed following Fanny's death. Wollstonecraft closed the school and departed for Ireland in search of a new 'destined home' (p. 82) as governess to the daughters of Lord and Lady Kingsborough in 1786. The sense of displacement, central to Wollstonecraft's self-image in Bath and Windsor, developed in Ireland into a fervid commitment to the cult of sensibility. Her letters suggest that aligning herself with the values of sensibility allowed her to assert her self-worth and manage the strain of her role as a governess,

⁶⁸ Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, x.

⁶⁹ Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, p. 46.

socially 'betwixt and between' (p. 88).⁷⁰ In contrast to Mary Robinson's sentimental portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire, Wollstonecraft stresses the 'sensibility nature gave me' (p. 93) in order to establish her superiority over her employers and their aristocratic circle. In a mocking lament, delivered among Lady Kingsborough's lapdogs and rouges, she declares 'alas poor sentiment it has no residence here' (p. 91).

Wollstonecraft's belief in her superior sensibility and her transformation from a 'spectator' to 'a sojourner in a strange land' (p. 99) was an integral mediating step towards her incarnation in London as a woman of letters. The catalyst was her turbulent literary love affair with Rousseau, which began after she read *Emile* in Dublin in March 1787 (p. 114).⁷¹ In his analysis of Rousseau's readership, Robert Darnton concludes that 'Rousseau taught his readers to "digest" books so thoroughly that literature became absorbed in life'.⁷² Wollstonecraft was a devoted student, rehearsing Rousseau's vocabulary in her letters and imagining herself travelling 'through the *solitary* path' immersed in 'reveries' (p. 113). In a letter to Everina, she presents a displaced, confessional self-portrait through her analysis of Rousseau's character:

He rambles into that [] *chimerical* world in which I have too often [wand]ered - and draws the usual conclusion, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. He was a strange inconsistent unhappy clever creature - yet he possessed an uncommon portion of sensibility and penetration. (p. 115)

Wollstonecraft's marriage of self-martyrdom and social commentary was indebted to Rousseau, but her exploration of the literature of sensibility extended beyond the man of feeling. In a letter to Joseph Johnson of December 1786, she requested a copy of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Essays* (p. 96). In contrast to Williams's position within the bluestocking circle, Wollstonecraft resisted assimilation within a literary sisterhood (with the notable exception of her identification with Catharine Macaulay).⁷³ Instead, as a professional woman writer, Wollstonecraft imagined herself as 'the first of a new genus' (p. 139), unprecedented and ahead of her time. Barbara Taylor's repositioning of Wollstonecraft among her female intellectual

⁷⁰ Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, pp. 102-03.

⁷¹ For a summary of Wollstonecraft's literary engagements with Rousseau, see Parke, pp. 103-19.

⁷² Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 244.

⁷³ Bridget Hill, 'The Links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay: New Evidence', *Women's History Review*, 4 (1995), 177-92.

contemporaries challenges this self-portrait, although aspects of it remain in the analysis of her most recent biographer Lyndal Gordon.⁷⁴ However, as the reference to Charlotte Smith suggests, Wollstonecraft was aware of the potential for the woman of feeling to attain public reputation and economic independence by putting her sensibility on display.

As a writer and reviewer for Joseph Johnson from 1787, Wollstonecraft translated the melancholy observer of her early letters into the feminist philosopher and Enlightenment historian of London and Paris. Her former impulse for detachment became the source of her radical critique, and her capacity to imagine spiritual rewards as a consolation for present sorrows was transformed into a commitment to social and political reform. Wollstonecraft described Johnson's radical circle as 'the kind of company *I* find most pleasure in' (p. 141) and she revelled in its 'egalitarian camaraderie', to take Barbara Taylor's term.⁷⁵ This was in contrast to Williams, who favoured the polite sociability of the bluestockings and whose manners Wollstonecraft regarded as 'affected' (p. 215) at their first meeting in Paris in 1792. This difference was also reflected in the style of their revolutionary histories. Williams wrote as the 'benevolent historian' of sentimental politics and salon sociability, whereas, Wollstonecraft was initially attracted to the rationalist discourse of the public sphere.⁷⁶

'The cool eye of observation' and 'the pensive wanderer'

In contrast to Williams's euphoric entrance onto the revolutionary stage in 1790, Wollstonecraft's arrival in Paris in December 1792 coincided with an escalation in revolutionary violence following the recent September massacres. Wollstonecraft avoided arrest under the Law of Suspects in October 1793 by registering as Gilbert Imlay's wife with the American embassy and she escaped the height of the Terror in her move to Le Havre in 1794. Wollstonecraft's histories of France were therefore written in a state of anachronism. She recounted the golden age of the Revolution, in which she played a distant literary role in London, from a moment of horror in Paris

⁷⁴ Lyndal Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

⁷⁵ Taylor, p. 192.

⁷⁶ Deborah Kennedy, 'Benevolent Historian: Helen Maria Williams and Her British Readers', in *Rebellious Hearts* (see Craciun and Lokke, above), pp. 317-36 (p. 319).

experienced at first-hand. Developing her 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation' that was written during her first days in Paris, Wollstonecraft began work on *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* in Neuilly-sur-Seine in June 1793.⁷⁷ This followed the declaration of war between Britain and France and the overthrow of the Girondins. Wollstonecraft's response to the defeat of the Girondins is revealed in Godwin's comment of 1798 that 'she described to me, more than once, the anguish she felt at hearing of the death of Brissot, Vergniaud, and the twenty deputies, as one of the most intolerable sensations she had ever experienced'.⁷⁸ However, characteristically, Wollstonecraft found consolation for disillusionment and distress by adopting the role of the spectator in her writing.

In *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), Wollstonecraft traces the progress of the Revolution from a lofty prospect. She expresses events in a highly visual register of sights, views, scenes, and exhibits, and imagines herself providing a 'cool eye of observation'.⁷⁹ She therefore rejects Williams's sentimental historiography, arguing that it is 'necessary to guard against the erroneous inferences of sensibility' as 'reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion' (p. 6).⁸⁰ The core of Wollstonecraft's revolutionary politics is an enduring investment in the future. In her melancholy account of the fall of the Bastille in 1789, the violence of 1793 is a palpable presence. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft suggests that disappointment may be transfigured into optimism if we turn from the dazzling moment to contemplate the historical lesson:

⁷⁷ 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation' first appeared in *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by William Godwin, 4 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1798), IV. Wollstonecraft suggested that this work would be the first instalment of a series, but in reality it became a preparatory work for *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794).

⁷⁸ Godwin, *Memoirs*, p. 244.

⁷⁹ *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (see Todd and Butler, above), VI. 4-235 (p. 6). In this section, further references to the *French Revolution* are given after quotations in the text.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the influence of Scottish Enlightenment historiography on Wollstonecraft's perspective and authorial persona, see Jane Rendall, "'The Grand Causes which Combine To Carry Mankind Forward': Wollstonecraft, History and Revolution", in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Bicentennial*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marie Mulvey-Roberts (= *Women's Writing*, 4.2 (1997)), pp. 155-72.

The transports of the people, and the sympathy of the deputies, must have formed a highly interesting scene: success elevating the heart for the moment, and hope gilding the future prospect. – But the imagination would languidly pourtray this dazzling sunshine, depressed by the recollection of the sinister events, that have since clouded the bright beams. Precluded then by melancholy reflections from rejoicing with the happy throng, it is necessary to turn our attention to the circumstances, from which mankind may draw instruction. (p. 103-04)

This portrayal of the fall of the Bastille in terms of ‘scenes’, ‘transports’, ‘elevations’ and ‘sympathy’ is reminiscent of Williams’s eyewitness account of the Festival of the Federation in the first volume of her *Letters from France* (reviewed by Wollstonecraft for the *Analytical* in December 1790).⁸¹ By rehearsing Williams’s earlier position, Wollstonecraft consigns this account of the Revolution to a former era and suggests that the past spectacle can only be perceived through the lens of the subsequent tragedy. Williams’s illuminations become falsely bright (either gilded or dazzling) and the hearts of the crowd are elevated for just a ‘moment’ before the imagination is overwhelmed by recollection. Wollstonecraft cannot escape to a pristine instant from which she was personally absent, but she finds consolation in imagining history as pedagogy and transforms a sense of belatedness into a position of strength. She commits herself to ‘tracing the mistakes, and profiting from the discoveries of one generation’ (p. 183), as collective history rather than personal nostalgia enables a continued faith in revolutionary politics.

However, Wollstonecraft ultimately seems to doubt whether the identity of the indifferent spectator is desirable or sustainable in a revolutionary landscape. In her public history, she provides a revelatory account of her visit to a deserted Versailles (empty after the departure of the royal family following the October Days of 1789). Desperately attempting to sustain her identity as ‘only a spectator’, Wollstonecraft nonetheless appears as a figure in the narrative. In an extended description of Versailles, she notes that ‘warily entering the endless apartments, half shut up. the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses, that vainly gleam in every direction, slacken the nerves, without appalling the heart’ (pp. 84-85).⁸² The figure in the glass is implicitly an embodiment of Wollstonecraft’s conscience.

⁸¹ Williams, *Letters from France*, I, 1, 5-17.

⁸² Ashley Tauchert reads this abrupt interjection of the authorial voice as the resurfacing of Wollstonecraft’s repressed maternal body. Ashley Tauchert, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Accent of the Feminine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 92-93.

described in correspondent terms to Adam Smith's impartial spectator in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In a chapter headed 'On the principle of self-approbation and of self-disapprobation', Smith remarks:

We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct.⁸³

In Versailles the impartial spectator haunts the detached spectator, whose reflections in the glass force the 'pensive wanderer' into a moment of self-recrimination for intellectually supporting the act of regicide. However, in the garden the self-evasion ends and private pathos overwhelms ideological commitments, as Wollstonecraft presents herself 'weeping – scarcely conscious that I weep' (p. 85).

This eruption of uncontrolled and unconscious weeping in Wollstonecraft's detached public history suggests that in her response to the death of Louis XVI she fails, as Williams expresses it, to 'lose sight of the individual sufferer, to meditate upon the destiny of mankind'.⁸⁴ The image of the weeping woman writer echoes Wollstonecraft's self-presentation in a letter to Johnson, composed on the evening she witnessed Louis XVI's journey to the scaffold:

I bowed to the majesty of the people, and respected the propriety of behaviour so perfectly in unison with my own feelings. I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes, when I saw Louis.⁸⁵

Drawing on Thomas Paine's theory of the 'metaphor called a crown', Wollstonecraft suggests that in the moment of death the king proved his humanity by transferring his 'majesty' to the people, commanding sympathy as a man rather than an idol, and inspiring spontaneous tears.⁸⁶ She turns to current philosophical theories to express an emotional outburst, reflecting that 'an association of ideas made the tears flow'. She therefore philosophises on her expressions of guilt and grief in her private correspondence and allows uncontrolled emotion to disrupt the linear narrative of her

⁸³ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 112.

⁸⁴ Williams, *Letters from France*, I, 3, 2.

⁸⁵ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 216.

⁸⁶ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 124.

public history.⁸⁷ In addition, she dramatises her feelings of complicity in her identification with the notorious regicide Macbeth:⁸⁸

I cannot dismiss the lively images that have filled my imagination all the day. - Nay, do not smile, but pity me; for, once or twice, lifting my eyes from the paper, I have seen eyes glare through a glass-door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me. Not the distant sound of a footstep can I hear. - My apartments are remote from those of the servants, the only persons who sleep with me in an immense hotel, one folding door opening after another. - I wish I had even kept the cat with me! - I want to see something alive; I am going to bed - and, for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle.⁸⁹

Mary Jacobus argues that *Macbeth* 'provides a touchstone for "reflections" on the French Revolution' in the 1790s, evident in Williams's comments that during the execution of Louis XVI 'the long page of human history rushed upon the mind - age after age arose to memory, in sad succession, like the line of Banquo'.⁹⁰ However, the eyes in the 'glass-door opposite' also reveal the presence of Smith's impartial spectator. In the letter to Johnson, Wollstonecraft is confronted with the figure in the mirror that she wished to avoid in Versailles in an intimate visual encounter that can only be evaded through the private act of confession at her desk.

Revolutionary romance and its 'unfortunate survivor'

In a letter to William Roscoe, written on the eve of her departure for Paris in November 1792, Wollstonecraft imagines herself as 'a Spinster on the wing'.⁹¹ However, she evokes her former persona of the 'old maid' (p. 13) only to rewrite the script in her declaration that 'at Paris, indeed, I might take a husband for the time being, and get divorced when my truant heart longed again to nestle with its old friends' (p. 208). This narrative proved prescient, as from 1793 Wollstonecraft found a 'husband' in the American entrepreneur, author, and former soldier Gilbert Imlay, got a 'divorce', and became a mother. Her heart then returned 'to nestle with its old friends' in London in April 1795. In her correspondence, written prior to her departure for France, Wollstonecraft repeatedly rejects the false paradise of conjugal

⁸⁷ Vivien Jones argues that Wollstonecraft's rational history is dependent on fictional paradigms at moments of crisis. Jones, 'Women Writing Revolution', p. 181.

⁸⁸ Blakemore, *Crisis*, pp. 102-19.

⁸⁹ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 217.

⁹⁰ Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 36; Blakemore, *Crisis*, pp. 172-73; and Williams, *Letters from France*, I. 4, 11.

⁹¹ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 208. In this section, further references to the *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* are given after quotations in the text.

bliss through a dismissal of the union of Milton's Adam and Eve. She remarks that 'I cannot help viewing them, I mean the first pair – as if they were my inferiors' (p. 180). However, the undisclosed narrative of these letters is Wollstonecraft's growing obsession with the artist Henry Fuseli. The sub-plot is obliquely alluded to in the Miltonic image, as Fuseli was painting a series from *Paradise Lost* during this period (p. 194). Wollstonecraft's connection with the artist ended abruptly when her proposal to live in a *ménage à trois* was rejected by his wife. She therefore departed for Paris alone in December 1792 and, according to *The Annual Necrology*, travelled 'with a view "to lose in public happiness the sense of private misery"'.⁹² However, this disassociation between 'public happiness' and 'private misery' was exposed in France as a misconception, since her relationship with Imlay was also an expression of her political commitments.⁹³

The *Letters to Imlay* were composed from 1793 to 1795 and were published posthumously by William Godwin in 1798. They chart the progress and collapse of Wollstonecraft's experiment with 'revolutionary conjugality' that resulted in the birth of Fanny Imlay in May 1794 and Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts in May and October 1795.⁹⁴ Initially, Imlay acts as a source of consolation for the horrors of violence. He is characterised as 'a most natural, unaffected creature' (p. 249), in contrast to the enervated French who are unable to live up to a revolutionary ideal. Following the birth of Fanny, Wollstonecraft proudly reports the comment of her midwife that she 'ought to make children for the Republic' (p. 253). She refers to Fanny as 'our little Hercules' (p. 263), evoking the image of the Republic's seal and presenting this Anglo-American child as the true heir of the Revolution. However, Wollstonecraft is subsequently forced to rewrite this political and personal romance in tragic terms. In a letter to Imlay of 1 January 1794, she presents a harrowing self-portrait:

⁹² *The Annual Necrology for 1797-8* (London: R. Phillips, 1800), p. 424.

⁹³ Mary Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 78.

⁹⁴ Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 170.

‘I am fallen,’ as Milton said, ‘on evil days;’ for I really believe that Europe will be in a state of convulsion, during half a century at least. Life is but a labour of patience: it is always rolling a great stone up a hill; for, before a person can find a resting-place, imagining it is lodged, down it comes again, and all the work is to be done over anew! (p. 238)

The Miltonic echo of her early letters is transformed from an allusion to domestic bliss into an expression of political heartbreak. She also evokes her mother’s dying words in her claim that ‘life is but a labour of patience’. The image of the dead (rather than republican) mother recurs in Wollstonecraft’s attempts to connect her personal miseries to a public narrative of women’s violent political exclusion. She remarks, ‘I wish one moment that I had never heard of the cruelties that have been practised here, and the next envy the mothers who have been killed with their children’ as she desires to ‘forget my misery – so that my head or heart would be still’ (p. 283). She aligns herself with the heroines of the guillotine in terms reminiscent of Williams. However, Williams presents the community of heroic martyrs as a repository for the spirit of Revolution in an act of public remembrance. In contrast, Wollstonecraft imagines revolutionary violence as a liberation from the pain of memory and perpetual movement in an act of personal forgetting. In her *Letters from France*, Williams intertwines the persona of the sentimental correspondent and the revolutionary historian. However, Wollstonecraft’s *Letters to Imlay* demonstrate the collapse of sensibility and the epistolary form in a revolutionary landscape. For Wollstonecraft’s pervasive fantasy of her correspondent’s identity destroys the sentimental ideal of a sympathetic exchange mediated by writing to the moment.

The ‘solitary walker’ and the “‘little hero of each tale”

In *A Short Residence* (1796), the ‘sad scenes’ Wollstonecraft witnessed in France exert a pressure on her writing.⁹⁵ The landscape is populated by images of death, bones, embalmed bodies, infanticide, starvation, imprisonment, and ruins. In the aftermath of the Terror, Williams comments that ‘a funereal veil seems to me to be spread over nature’.⁹⁶ Echoing these sentiments in Risør, Wollstonecraft imagines herself ‘bastilled by nature’ and ‘enclosed’ on ‘every side’ by the rocks and the

⁹⁵ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 248.

⁹⁶ Williams, *Letters from France*, II, 5, 4.

ocean.⁹⁷ In Copenhagen she surveys the devastation of the Great Fire of June 1795 and is confronted by the survivors displaced by the disaster:

I could not take refuge in the thought; *they suffered – but they are no more!* a reflection I frequently summon to calm my mind, when sympathy rises to anguish: I therefore desired the driver to hasten to the hotel recommended to me, that I might avert my eyes, and snap the train of thinking which had sent me into all the corners of the city, in search of houseless heads. (pp. 319-20)

Despite her attempts to ‘snap the train of thinking’ which leads from the survivors of Copenhagen to the victims of the guillotine, her revealing search for the ‘houseless heads’ suggests that the portrait of Scandinavia is inflected by past revolutionary horrors. She identifies with the survivors displaced by events. However, her capacity for feeling is overwhelmed by the scale of suffering and as sympathy rises to anguish the observer averts her eyes from the scene.

This loss of faith in human sympathy suggests that Wollstonecraft experiences a crisis in Scandinavia comparable to Williams’s momentary doubts over ‘social happiness’ in Switzerland.⁹⁸ For both writers Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) acts as a touchstone for these feelings of disconnection, evident in Wollstonecraft’s reflections in her personal correspondence:

Love is a want of my heart. I have examined myself lately with more care than formerly, and find, that to deaden is not to calm the mind – Aiming at tranquillity, I have almost destroyed all the energy of my soul - almost rooted out what renders it estimable [...] I am now endeavouring to recover myself.⁹⁹

In her travelogue, Wollstonecraft distances herself from Rousseau’s ideal of ‘total calm’ and ‘absolute tranquillity’ in which he aspires to be ‘as unmoved as God himself’.¹⁰⁰ Instead, she foregrounds her physicality and her sensualism in the role of ‘an emphatically embodied perceiver’, as Elizabeth Bohls expresses it.¹⁰¹ Nancy Yousef identifies the authorial persona of the *Residence* as an ethical challenge to Rousseau’s fantasy of solitary self-fashioning and suggests that Wollstonecraft’s romantic subjectivity is grounded in an ‘inter-subjective context’.¹⁰² As Yousef

⁹⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Residence*, p. 295. In this section, further references to the *Residence* are given after quotations in the text.

⁹⁸ Williams, *Letters from France*, II, 6, 4.

⁹⁹ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 310.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. by Peter France (London: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 29-31.

¹⁰¹ Bohls, p. 162.

¹⁰² Yousef, p. 537.

observes, for Wollstonecraft writing allows personal experience to find fulfilment in others, evident in her remark in her preface that ‘the keeping of a journal excites to many useful enquiries that would not have been thought of, had the traveller only determined to see all he could see, without ever asking himself for what purpose’ (p. 256).¹⁰³ In the advertisement, Wollstonecraft suggests the autobiography will be justified if it can ‘win on our attention by acquiring our affection’ and comments that her readers might ‘shut the book, if they do not wish to become better acquainted with me’ (p. 241). This conception of writing in which ‘author and reader triumphed together over the artifice of literary communication’ is partly indebted to Rousseau.¹⁰⁴ However, Wollstonecraft may also have in mind Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). For in her allusion to imaginary readers ‘who follow the same route’ or ‘accompany you in their chair’ (p. 241), she aligns herself with Sterne’s sentimental exchange rather than Rousseau’s emotional retreat.¹⁰⁵

Wollstonecraft’s conception of writing as a mode of attachment rather than a mark of unique distinction represents a radical rejection of her past literary self-presentations as the tortured genius, sentimental heroine, and solitary walker. On a personal level, she also signals her freedom from her disabling relationships with Fuseli, Imlay, and Rousseau. While Wollstonecraft was composing *A Short Residence* in 1795, she wrote to Fuseli requesting the return of the letters that she had sent to the artist during 1792.¹⁰⁶ She prefaces her request with the comment that ‘I have long ceased to expect kindness or affection from any human creature, and would fain tear from my heart its treacherous sympathies. I am alone’.¹⁰⁷ However, in her public address in *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft transforms this desperate self-image into an assertion of human connection:

¹⁰³ Yousef, p. 557.

¹⁰⁴ Darnton, p. 228.

¹⁰⁵ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹⁰⁶ Wollstonecraft wrote to Imlay and Fuseli requesting the return of her letters in 1795, but only Imlay complied. *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, pp. 332 and 336.

¹⁰⁷ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 336.

What are these imperious sympathies? How frequently has melancholy and even mysanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind; – I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, made me feel that I was still a part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself – not, perhaps, for the reflection has been carried very far, by snapping the thread of an existence which loses its charms in proportion as the cruel experience of life stops or poisons the current of the heart. (pp. 248-49)

The ‘treacherous’ sympathies of the private letter have become ‘imperious’ in the public narrative, since Wollstonecraft imagines sympathy as an irresistible force rather than the enemy within. Her sense of isolation, conveyed to Fuseli in the simple assertion ‘I am alone’, is consigned through the use of the past tense to a former chapter in her life. She therefore reinforces the claim that she makes elsewhere in the *Residence* that she had ‘turned over in this solitude a new page in the history of my own heart’ (p. 289). The image of the ‘particle’ rewrites a metaphor of severance as an expression of attachment and is taken from one of her accusatory letters to Imlay, in which she remarks ‘you seem to me only to have been anxious to shake me off – regardless whether you dashed me to atoms by the fall’.¹⁰⁸ During her tour of Scandinavia, she revealingly comments ‘what a long time it requires to know ourselves; and yet almost every one has more of this knowledge than he is willing to own, even to himself’ (p. 289). In this moment, Wollstonecraft acknowledges that her struggle for self-acceptance is part of a universal human quest.

Many critics note Wollstonecraft’s personal and literary transformation in *A Short Residence*. She abandons rational detachment in favour of political analysis grounded in the particularities of her personal experience and recognises the value of physical pleasure and emotional response.¹⁰⁹ In this work, Wollstonecraft also politicises her autobiographical reflections in her famous insight that ‘most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex: we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel’ (p. 325). She echoes the strategies of Elizabeth Steele, emotionally involved in her history and yet retaining a critical eye in her social

¹⁰⁸ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 333.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 83-94; Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 103; Tauchert, p. 98; Myers, ‘Romantic Autobiography’, pp. 174-76; Bohls, p. 162; and Taylor, p. 126.

commentary. Wollstonecraft distances herself from the commercial transaction that underpins her journey. However, her first-hand experience of the effects of commerce on her lover guarantees the integrity of her critique.¹¹⁰ In addition, while gazing at her daughter, she remarks ‘I feel more than a mother’s fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex’ (p. 269). This is not an image of sentimental and literary motherhood, like Mary Robinson’s *Memoirs*, but a self-revelation in which personal sorrows become the source of a political analysis.¹¹¹

This connection between a mother’s fondness and political reflections supports Virginia Sapiro’s contention that Wollstonecraft attempts to imagine a collective political consciousness in opposition to Rousseau’s autonomous male citizen in her later writings.¹¹² In *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft demonstrates a new propensity to identify with female figures. In her chance encounters with abandoned mothers and happy families she reads her fears and aspirations writ large. She refracts her narrative through the personal histories of others and temporarily modifies the prevailing image of Romantic solitude. Like Mary Robinson, Wollstonecraft explores alternative models of public selfhood through identification with iconic women. In her assault on the spiritually impoverishing effects of commerce she aligns herself with the prophet Cassandra, who is described in her narrative as ‘not the only prophetess whose warning voice has been disregarded’ (p. 342). However, most striking of all is her new willingness to embrace royal connections. In *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, Marie-Antoinette is portrayed as ‘a profound dissembler’, ‘adept in all the arts of coquetry’, and with a heart ‘dead to the tender emotions of benevolence’.¹¹³ In *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft imagines herself ‘following the footsteps’ (p. 329) and ‘haunted’ by ‘the unfortunate Matilda’ (p. 321), sister to George III and wife to Christian VII of Denmark. She identifies with the Danish Queen Caroline Matilda as a mother, lover, and reformer, suggesting that ‘she

¹¹⁰ For a detailed outline of Wollstonecraft’s commercial investigations, see Per Nyström, *Mary Wollstonecraft’s Scandinavian Journey*, trans. by George R. Otter (Göteborg: Kungl. Vetenskaps-och Vitterhets-Samhället, 1980); and Gordon, pp. 232-86.

¹¹¹ Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 305.

¹¹² Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 183-84; and Virginia Sapiro, ‘Wollstonecraft, Feminism, and Democracy: “Being Bastilled”’, in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Maria J. Falco (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 33-45.

¹¹³ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, pp. 72-74.

probably ran into an error common to innovators, in wishing to do immediately what can only be done by time' (p. 322). This portrayal echoes Wollstonecraft's implied self-critique in the Appendix (p. 346).¹¹⁴ However, standing behind the figure of Caroline Matilda is Marie-Antoinette. This haunting evokes the earlier visit to Versailles and suggests that in Scandinavia Wollstonecraft accepted the coexistence of sexuality and political identity and made her peace with France.

Sydney McMillen Conger and Mitzi Myers suggest that Wollstonecraft's identification with Cassandra and Caroline Matilda is part of her persistent impulse to align herself with tragic female figures.¹¹⁵ However, by emphasising the reformist identities of these women without obscuring their personal narratives, Wollstonecraft rewrites the image of the solitary sentimental heroine and discovers the personal and political potential of becoming "the little hero of each tale" (p. 241). As a reader of sentimental fiction for the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft attacks the disabling effect on female subjectivity of identifying with romantic heroines and internalising fictional conventions. As Cora Kaplan argues, for Wollstonecraft:

Popular sensational literature both reinforced and evoked a set of romantic scenarios that the reader will use at once to interpret, act through and escape from ordinary life. Each part of this reading effect is 'bad'; each involves different elements of projection and displacement and constitute together the negative effect of fiction and fantasy.¹¹⁶

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft suggests that 'stale tales' described in 'a sentimental jargon' inevitably 'tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties'.¹¹⁷ In *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) Mary's mother embodies this degenerate condition. Novels act as 'delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation' and she writes herself into the romantic scenario so successfully that 'she accompanied the lovers to the lonely arbors, and would walk with them by the clear light of the moon'.¹¹⁸ Wollstonecraft's bleak conception of fiction and fantasy is partly tempered by an acknowledgement that sentimental novels might be an improvement on no reading at all. She remarks in *A Vindication of the Rights of*

¹¹⁴ Jacobus, *First Things*, pp. 74-75.

¹¹⁵ Conger, pp. 156-59; and Myers, 'Romantic Autobiography', p. 174.

¹¹⁶ Kaplan, pp. 123-24.

¹¹⁷ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (see Todd and Butler, above), V, 61-266 (p. 256).

¹¹⁸ *Mary: A Fiction*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (see Todd and Butler, above), I, 1-73 (pp. 8-9).

Woman that ‘any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank’, echoing her comments on the daughters of the Kingsboroughs in 1786 that ‘I almost wish the girls were novels readers and romantic, I declare false refinement is better than none, at all’.¹¹⁹ In an analysis of Wollstonecraft’s contributions to the *Analytical Review*, Mitzi Myers argues that her ‘real quarrel with women writers centers around affectation, falsity, and imitation; it is never with sensibility, passion, imagination, or fiction per se, and certainly not with narrative that feelingly renders female experience’.¹²⁰ Wollstonecraft’s review of 1790 suggests that this ideal is broadly attained by Helen Maria Williams’s *Julia: A Novel*, as she notes ‘we warmly recommend her novel to our young female readers, who will here meet with refinement of sentiment, without a very great alloy of romantic notions’.¹²¹

In *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft revises the sentimental form and recognises the liberating potential of fictional identifications. Paradoxically, creating an alternative history of her liaison with Imlay and identifying with the autobiographical heroine releases Wollstonecraft (at least temporarily) from a self-created fiction of their relationship. Her narrative evokes the literary convention of the abandoned victim and her treacherous lover. However, she deliberately resists a tragic or romantic conclusion, as the suffering woman writer renders the unworthy hero an indistinct and silent presence. She invites her reader into an empowering identification with a heroine whose coherence is dependent on authentic personal response and the capacity for self-revision.¹²² Yet, as Catherine Parke suggests, she continues ‘to question the very definition of the heroine’.¹²³ In her *Memoir*, Quaker Priscilla Hannah Gurney resists interpreting her experience through pre-determined spiritual narratives. However, she creatively adapts the conventions of the spiritual autobiography to her own purposes. Similarly, in *A Short Residence*, Wollstonecraft attempts to create a new form in which to articulate and understand her personal experience and replaces ‘fictive conventions’ with ‘romantic freedoms’.¹²⁴ In her quest for an autobiographical mode that provides women with self-expression and a

¹¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 256; and *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 91.

¹²⁰ Mitzi Myers, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s Literary Reviews’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (see Todd, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s Letters’, above), pp. 82-98 (p. 92).

¹²¹ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical*, p. 252.

¹²² Myers, ‘Romantic Autobiography’, p. 170.

¹²³ Parke, p. 107.

¹²⁴ Myers, *Reviews*, p. 94.

public voice, Wollstonecraft, like Williams, revises the sentimental form for a post-revolutionary age.

'A female Werter' and an 'intellectual character'

William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (1798) has been censured by history, predominately, as Claire Tomalin argues, for 'minimizing' Wollstonecraft's 'claim to be taken seriously for her ideas, and presenting her instead as the female Werther, a romantic and tragic heroine'.¹²⁵ However, the extent to which Godwin's portrayal mirrors Wollstonecraft's strategy of becoming "'the little hero of each tale'" is not so widely acknowledged.¹²⁶ In the *Memoirs*, Godwin asserts the radicalism of Wollstonecraft's ability to privilege authentic emotion over adherence to social forms. In his preface, he suggests that 'it seldom happens that such a person passes through life, without being the subject of thoughtless calumny, or malignant misrepresentation'.¹²⁷ He therefore evokes Wollstonecraft's self-portrait in *A Short Residence* as one of few 'sign-posts, which point out the road to others, whilst forced to stand still themselves amidst the mud and dust'.¹²⁸ In an extension of the signpost metaphor, Godwin suggests that the personal histories of figures such as Wollstonecraft provide 'the fairest source of animation and encouragement to those who would follow them in the same career' (p. 204). For in the *Memoirs*, he attempts to imagine a reader worthy of Wollstonecraft's legacy and encourages us into a sympathetic identification with a revolutionary heroine.

In his 'Essay of History and Romance' (1797), Godwin argues that the biographies of 'illustrious' subjects might allow us to 'insensibly imbibe the same spirit, and burn with kindred fires' as we bring the history of a life to bear on ourselves.¹²⁹ The *Memoirs* is structured by Godwin's desire to absorb Wollstonecraft's influence, evident in his remark that 'while I have described the improvement I was in the act of receiving, I believe I have put down the leading traits of her intellectual character' (p.

¹²⁵ Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 238.

¹²⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Residence*, p. 241.

¹²⁷ Godwin, *Memoirs*, p. 204. In this section, further references to the *Memoirs* are given after quotations in the text.

¹²⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Residence*, p. 337.

¹²⁹ 'Essay of History and Romance', in *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. by Mark Philp and Pamela Clemit, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), V, 290-301 (p. 293).

273). In Godwin's revisions to the second edition of the *Memoirs*, published at the end of 1798, the slippage between personal improvement and public benefit is intensified. He comments that 'a companion like this, excites and animates the mind. From such an one we imbibe, what perhaps I principally wanted, the habit of minutely attending to first impressions, and justly appreciating them'.¹³⁰ The movement from 'we' to 'I' inscribes Godwin within a community, yet also singles him out as Wollstonecraft's ideal pupil. For, as Mitzi Myers argues, the *Memoirs* is 'the generous artistic tribute of a diligent student to a gifted teacher'.¹³¹ However, this autobiographical impulse is treacherous. Mary Jacobus argues that Godwin harnesses 'her life to an account of his own conversion into a man of feeling'.¹³² This interpretation encourages Godwin to perceive their marriage as a reciprocation between his own capacities for 'logical and metaphysical distinction' and Wollstonecraft's 'taste for the picturesque' (pp. 272-73). Furthermore, the endeavour to present Wollstonecraft as an exemplary revolutionary subject in fact establishes her as 'a public example to keep us from error' like Sophia Baddeley.¹³³ For in the words of the *Anti-Jacobin Review* of 1798, her life becomes a 'buoy' not a 'beacon'.¹³⁴

Wollstonecraft highlights the potential for fictional identifications to seduce female readers and for romantic teleologies to imprison women writers, while still recognising the political and rhetorical power of the personal. The epistolary and reverie form of *A Short Residence* is an ideal mode in which to express her identity, as it enables literary and social identifications and allows a convergence of personal history and public polemic. In contrast, by fleshing out the shadowy plot that underlies *A Short Residence*, Godwin inadvertently inscribes Wollstonecraft within a fixed sentimental form. He therefore enables the personal tragedy to obscure the politics of her life and allows her experience to be read in conventional rather than revolutionary terms. However, while the reception of the *Memoirs* and its influence on Wollstonecraft's feminist legacy reveal the dangers of becoming a heroine, the

¹³⁰ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'*, 2nd edn (London: J. Johnson, 1798), p. 204.

¹³¹ Mitzi Myers, 'Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject', *Studies in Romanticism*, 20 (1981), 299-316 (p. 316).

¹³² Mary Jacobus, 'Intimate Connections: Scandalous Memoirs and Epistolary Indiscretion', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 274-89 (p. 278).

¹³³ John Williams, *The Children of Thespis* (Dublin: T. McDonnell, 1787), p. 19.

¹³⁴ *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, July 1798, p. 94.

work nonetheless suggests the liberating potential of a revolutionary politics produced out of lived experience.

‘Only Scenes of Gratulation to Witness, and Only Tears of Luxury to Shed!’:

Helen Maria Williams’s *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798)

By the time of Wollstonecraft’s death in 1797, Helen Maria Williams had been assimilated into the anti-Jacobin narrative of the revolutionary woman who was characterised by sexual excess and a lack of feminine sympathy. As Janet Todd observes, Wollstonecraft and Williams were ‘associated with sensibility and with rationalism, both regarded as ridiculous extremes in an England increasingly devoted to “common sense”’.¹³⁵ Richard Polwhele’s *The Unsex’d Females* (1798) confirmed Williams’s transformation in the public imagination from ‘the fair Helen’ to ‘an intemperate advocate for Gallic licentiousness’.¹³⁶ However, despite the hardening political climate and increasing francophobia in Britain, Williams continued to imagine herself as a revolutionary subject and preserved her faith in the political power of life writing into the nineteenth century.

In *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798), Williams recalls a period of self-recovery and self-revision comparable to Wollstonecraft’s experiences in Scandinavia. She engages with the political reality of the Revolution at a geographical distance, reassesses her relationship to Rousseau, and interrogates the sentimental politics of her *Letters from France*. Published only weeks before the French invasion of Switzerland, *A Tour in Switzerland* offers ‘an anticipated apology’ for France’s actions (even if Williams would subsequently be shocked by the bloody reality of events).¹³⁷ She seeks to challenge the myth of Switzerland as a ‘Temple of Liberty’, established by works such as William Coxe’s *Travels in Switzerland* (1789) and Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle*

¹³⁵ Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989), p. 199.

¹³⁶ Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex’d Females: A Poem* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), p. 19.

¹³⁷ Nigel Leask, ‘Salons, Alps and Cordilleras: Helen Maria Williams, Alexander von Humboldt, and the Discourse of Romantic Travel’, in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere* (see Jacobus, above), pp. 217-35 (p. 230).

Héloïse (1761).¹³⁸ She argues instead that the country is in need of ‘a spark from the blaze of French liberty’ (II, 275) in order to ‘deserve the character it has long usurped, of being the most free in Europe’ (II, 119). Williams’s confidence reflects the security of her position, since by 1798 she had influential friends in the Directory, such as LeGrand and Talleyrand.¹³⁹ She also regarded Napoleon as the ideal embodiment of revolutionary spirit, in his combination of masculine military heroism (demonstrated in the Italian campaign from 1796 to 1797) and feminine benevolence. In her writing, he emerges as the feminised hero who is able to convert ‘the destructive lightening of the conqueror’s sword into the benignant rays of freedom’ (II, 56).

In the *Letters from France*, Williams reveals that during her time in Switzerland she was attracted to the solipsistic persona of the Rousseauvian solitary walker. But in *A Tour in Switzerland* she takes issue with Rousseau, implying that a luxuriant indulgence in sensibility and a retreat into the realms of nature and the imagination is a potential distraction from political realities. Adriana Craciun persuasively argues that Williams’s relocation to Switzerland with her lover John Hurford Stone was a ‘political errand’ and a ‘business venture’ rather than a political flight. The trip was motivated by Stone’s printing and banking schemes and was facilitated by his role as intelligence gatherer for the Committee of Public Safety.¹⁴⁰ However, Craciun’s claim that in her writing Williams seeks to rival Robespierre for the role of Rousseau’s true ‘disciple’ overlooks her challenge to her former mentor in the *Tour*.¹⁴¹ Williams recounts her visit to Chillon Castle, the prison of the Pays de Vaud that was renowned as the site where Rousseau’s Julie nearly drowned. According to Williams, it attracted a ‘hundred sentimental pilgrims, who, with Heloise in hand, run over the rocks and mountains’ (II, 179). This literary shrine inspires Williams to reflect on the politics of sentiment:

The tear of sensibility which has so often been shed over this spot for the woes of fiction, may now fall for sorrows that have the dull reality of existence. It is not the imaginary maternal shriek that pierces the ear, it is the groan of the patriot rising from the floor of his damp dungeon that rends the heart. (II, 180)

¹³⁸ Helen Maria Williams, *A Tour in Switzerland*, 2 vols (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), II, 118. In this section, further references to the *Tour* are given after quotations in the text.

¹³⁹ Kennedy, *Revolution*, pp. 142-44.

¹⁴⁰ Craciun, *Citizens*, pp. 132-35.

¹⁴¹ Craciun, *Citizens*, pp. 106-07.

In contrast to the opening volumes of her *Letters from France*, Williams foregrounds the disjunction between sentimental fiction and political reality. She argues that the 'tear of sensibility', luxuriantly shed over the 'woes of fiction', must not distract her reader from the compassion demanded by 'dull reality'. However, in her emotionally charged response to the imprisoned patriot and her desire that the image 'rends the heart', she signals her ongoing commitment to an affective politics. The image of the 'patriot' in the 'damp dungeon' evokes her poetic prisoner of 'The Bastille: A Vision', a poetic interlude inserted into *Julia: A Novel* (1790).¹⁴² She also retains her faith in the sentimental narrative as a mode of historical analysis, revealed in her account of the romance of the émigrés she meets in Bellinzona (I, 273-322). She therefore establishes herself as the Revolution's enduring witness, historian, and sentimental respondent and relegates Rousseau to a moment prior to the Revolution's birth.

Rousseau's outdated and idealised response to Switzerland is juxtaposed with Williams's own determination to recognise the violent political realities taking place within the sublime landscape. She challenges Rousseau's interpretation of the inhabitants of the mountains of Switzerland and echoes Wollstonecraft's attack on his 'golden age of stupidity'.¹⁴³ She comments that 'I have often admired the charming picture which Rousseau traces of the inhabitants of those regions', but concludes that some members of the population 'are afflicted by the most humiliating of all the visitations of heaven, Idiotism' (II, 188). In addition, she substitutes her politicised portrait of the Rhine for Rousseau's rural idyll:

We were now at the source of that river whose gentle current had heretofore glided from its tranquil and solitary abode, to witness the scenes of carnage with which the ambition of monarchs has so often crimsoned its waters, but which then heard the songs of republican triumph, resounding along its distant banks. Happily these banks re-echo no longer the din of war, or the shout of victory; the thunder of the confederated powers on the continent of Europe, against the liberties of France, is hushed. (II, 22)

The optimism of this moment reflects the recent Campo Formio peace agreement between Austria and France, 17 October 1797. However, her happiness is qualified by the continuation of war between Britain and France, described by Williams as 'two

¹⁴² Helen Maria Williams, *Julia: A Novel; Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1790), II, 218-23.

¹⁴³ Wollstonecraft, *Residence*, p. 288.

nations, formed for mutual esteem and admiration' (II, 23). Chris Jones argues that Williams 'follows a trajectory common to many radical writers' in her transition 'from an idea of freedom realized in society to an idea of the individual freedom of the imagination in its relationship with nature'.¹⁴⁴ However, in her commitment to inscribing a political reality onto a sublime landscape, together with her critical engagement with Rousseau, Williams seems to resist this withdrawal. After contemplating the 'social happiness' of Switzerland, she suggests she is able to return to Paris with 'only scenes of gratulation to witness, and only tears of luxury to shed!' (II, 278).¹⁴⁵ Williams therefore celebrates the capacity of nature to restore her former identity as a feeling witness. However, she also interrogates her sentimental politics and epistolary history, welcoming her return to metropolitan sociability rather than remaining within a rural ideal.

**'The Revolution, Queen of all Earthly Reverses': Helen Maria Williams
(1801-1823)**

Williams's revision of her political identity that begins in *A Tour in Switzerland* is developed in her final volumes of French history, covering the aftermath of the Revolution, the Napoleonic era, and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. In her writing of 1801 to 1823, she revisits the dialectic between individual sympathy and general benevolence, examines the status of the spectacle, and evaluates the personal costs and collective benefits of political change. In *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic* (1801), Williams reflects on life under the Directory and Consulate from 1799 to 1800. She aligns Napoleon with her own politics of 'particularism', claiming that 'Bonaparte, amidst the wild uproar of combat, when all the tempestuous passions of the soul rage with convulsive fury, is capable of seizing with wakeful sensibility a minute circumstance, unobserved by others'.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 159.

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *Letters from France*, II, 6, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Helen Maria Williams, *Sketches of the State of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic*, 2 vols (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1801), II, 188. In this section, further references to the *Sketches* are given after quotations in the text.

In a chapter entitled 'On the State of Women in the French Republic' Williams develops this characterisation, establishing Napoleon and the female survivors of the Revolution as an alternative to the masculine fraternity of the Republic.¹⁴⁷ She notes that 'it was women, who, in those days of horror, proved that sensibility has its heroism – and that the affections of the heart can brace the nerves with energy, that mocks the calculations of danger' (II, 63). She suggests that female citizens have been betrayed and asks 'what claim has the Republic to the attachment of that part of the human race from whom it withholds the first privilege of our nature, the first gift of Heaven – instruction and knowledge?' (II, 53-54). Joan Wallach Scott echoes Williams's analysis in her argument that feminism was 'born of the republic' but 'was repeatedly sentenced to death by that same republic'.¹⁴⁸ However, for Williams, disempowerment ensures that the women of France remain uncorrupted. They 'have shrunk from the fraternal embrace' and 'have kept aloof from the contest, and, to use a military phrase, stood on their arms' (II, 50). In her military metaphors and her claim for a heroism of sensibility, Williams imagines Napoleon and the women of the French Republic as an elite community that offers a viable political alternative to the past.

Following Napoleon's elevation to First Consul on 10 November 1799, Williams invests this feminised soldier with the potential to restore the Revolution to its rightful course. She signals her optimism in her renewed faith in the aesthetics of the spectacle and the unified image of the crowd. Her reaction to the victorious soldiers of Marengo, who march through Paris on the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille in 1800, recalls her effusive response to the Festival of the Federation of a decade before:

The sight of the soldiers of Maringo, and the transports of their families, had excited those emotions to which every bosom vibrates; and when the affections are once powerfully awakened, all that touches not the heart appears insipid, and triumphal cars, and gay processions, lose their power of attraction. (II, 294-95)

However, despite Williams's initial enthusiasm for the regime, like many British radicals she became increasingly disillusioned after 1802 following Bonaparte's

¹⁴⁷ Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, pp. 197-99.

¹⁴⁸ Scott, p. 55.

‘rapid successive gradations’ to ‘the imperial purple’.¹⁴⁹ In April 1802 Napoleon restructured the Tribunate and the Senate, undertaking a ‘political purge’ of intellectuals and republicans (including Williams’s friends Nicholas Thiessé, Pierre Louis Ginguené, and Jean-Baptiste Say).¹⁵⁰ In May 1802 he reintroduced slavery in the colonies and in August assumed the title of First Consul for life, prior to his self-coronation as Emperor in 1804. During this period, Williams and Stone continued their commercial activities and from 1806 the English Press was the appointed printer of the government excise and tax papers. It remained one of the nation’s leading printing businesses until 1813, when it was bankrupted by ambitious publishing ventures and France’s economic crises.¹⁵¹ However, financial success coexisted with intellectual repression, evident in Williams’s comment that ‘the iron hand of despotism has weighed upon my soul, and subdued all intellectual energy’.¹⁵² At the end of 1801 she was imprisoned overnight when her poem *Ode to Peace* failed to praise Napoleon and in 1803 the state temporarily confiscated her edition of the forged correspondence of Louis XVI.

In her retrospective analysis, Williams draws an analogy between her disillusionment with the Napoleonic regime and her reassessment of revolutionary politics during the 1790s:

Yes, I admired Bonaparte; I admired also the French revolution. To my then youthful imagination, the day-star of liberty seemed to rise on the vine-covered hills of France, only to shed benedictions on humanity. I dreamt of prison-doors thrown open, - of dungeons visited by the light of day - of the peasant oppressed no longer - of equal rights, equal laws, a golden age, in which all that lived were to be happy. But how soon did these beautiful illusions vanish, and this star of liberty set in blood! [...] When Bonaparte first appeared on the political horizon, I was not yet cured of enthusiasm.¹⁵³

Williams revives the illuminated, natural, and architectural metaphors in which she imagined and expressed this golden age in her *Letters from France*, before the experience was contaminated by bloody scenes of revolutionary violence. The claim

¹⁴⁹ Helen Maria Williams, *A Narrative of the Events which have Taken Place in France, from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte, on the 1st of March, 1815, till the Restoration of Louis XVIII.* (London: John Murray, 1815), p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Kennedy, *Revolution*, p. 177. For accounts of Williams’s experiences during the Napoleonic era, see Kennedy, *Revolution*, pp. 153-83; and Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, pp. 192-209.

¹⁵¹ Madeleine B. Stern, ‘The English Press in Paris and its Successors, 1793-1852’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74 (1980), 307-59 (pp. 344-50).

¹⁵² Williams, *Narrative*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵³ Williams, *Narrative*, pp. 7-8.

that she 'was not yet' cured of enthusiasm implies that she writes at a moment of maturity and circumspection from which she is able to survey the 'false new dawns' of her past.¹⁵⁴ However, in the revival of her youthful imagination she experiences a renewal of her political faith and reattaches herself to the values of the past, signalled in her defiant declaration, 'I shall no longer hang my harp upon the willows, and despair of the future.'¹⁵⁵

Paradoxically, from 1816 Williams argues that the true defenders of the legacy of the Revolution are the restored Bourbon monarchy. Williams rejects the charge that this transformation represents an inconsistency or an abandonment of republican politics. She declares in *Souvenirs* (published in French in 1827) that 'it is not true that I have preached, turn by turn, as others say, the symbols of the terror, the imperial eagle and the white flag. I believe I have lived through the revolution with more constancy'.¹⁵⁶ Deborah Kennedy argues that Williams's support for the Bourbons 'marked a continuation of her leftist politics' and registered her opposition to the conservative Ultras, who threatened France's representative government and national constitution.¹⁵⁷ Williams signals her allegiance by contrasting a Bonapartist attempt at communal activity, in which 'all that now passed was a miserable mockery indeed, of the first bright moments of the revolution', with Louis XVIII's entry into Paris:¹⁵⁸

At the entry of Lewis XVIII. there was no programme, for there had been no preparation. The procession was less magnificent, but its accompaniments were far different. No – Bonaparte, in all the pride of his conquests, was never so welcomed! [...] The evening closed by what with great propriety may be called spontaneous illuminations, for nobody had thought of giving any general order to that purpose. But the people understood one another, and, as if it had been by the touch of some magical wand, all Paris was suddenly lighted up. Its poorest inhabitants had found something to spare for this demonstration of joy; and while the splendid hôtels of the wealthy blazed with a profusion of light, the lonely chamber of the indigent was cheered also with the luxury of a taper.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, p. 192.

¹⁵⁵ Williams, *Narrative*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Helen Maria Williams, *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française*, trans. by Charles Coquerel (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1827), p. 199. Quoted and trans. by Kennedy, in *Revolution*, p. 214.

¹⁵⁷ Kennedy, *Revolution*, p. 197.

¹⁵⁸ Williams, *Narrative*, p. 211.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, *Narrative*, pp. 271-72.

Ironically, in this collective illumination the royalist procession is invested with democratic values and revolutionary imagery, as Williams revives the politics and the aesthetics of a former moment.

Williams presents the return of the Bourbons as a continuation of revolutionary politics, arguing that what France has learnt in the intervening twenty-five years is a clearer view of a foundational moment. She claims that 'the French were too proud of their ABC liberty; they feel now that the alphabet is only the rudiment of science. They have learnt the table of contents of liberal principles, and they will at last comprehend the whole volume'.¹⁶⁰ By 1816 'liberty' is neither a feminine allegory, nor a Herculean force, but a text. This image maintains Williams's earlier desire for a perspective connecting the part to the whole, whether it is the spectator to the crowd or the sentimental narrative to the state of the nation. Williams questions in 1816 whether 'the French People, after all the mazy wanderings of the Revolution' are 'approaching an asylum'. She fails to provide an answer, but concludes:

This is indeed a momentous question. It is not made by me, as perhaps it may be by yourself, in the spirit of speculative investigation; to me it comprehends all that can awaken solicitude, all that can interest the heart; all chance of personal tranquillity towards the evening of a stormy life, and all hope of felicity for the objects most dear to me, and to whom life is opening.¹⁶¹

In Williams's aspiration for an asylum after the fall (registered in the Miltonic echo of the 'mazy wanderings') the psychological fate of the individual rests on the state of the nation and the body politic. Anne Mellor reads these lines as an expression of 'feminine Romanticism', suggesting that despite her love for liberty Williams's 'primary values were those of domestic tranquillity and the preservation of the civilised arts'.¹⁶² But the shelter Williams imagines that might end the wandering of a people, writer, and narrative is no retreat from politics, nor is domesticity set against revolutionary values. For it must be 'under the safe shelter of liberty' that she and France find repose.¹⁶³

In the final years of her life, Williams focuses increasingly on the connection between national and personal history. This intimacy was perhaps reinforced by her

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *Narrative*, p. 306.

¹⁶¹ Williams, *Narrative*, p. 303.

¹⁶² Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 76.

¹⁶³ Williams, *Narrative*, p. 305.

naturalisation as a French citizen in 1817. Two years later she published *Letters on the Events which have Passed in France since the Restoration in 1815*, reasserting in this final volume that her identity is shaped by her public role as a witness and a historian. In this work, she notes that political events have been ‘interwoven with every thing around me, linked with all my hopes or fears, connected with my very existence, and fixing irreparably my destiny’.¹⁶⁴ At times, Williams appears weary of the burden of recollection and aspires to a condition of forgetfulness in which ‘no event enchains attention, or fastens on the memory’ and ‘Revolutionary life is an *hors d’œuvre* in human existence’.¹⁶⁵ But collective memory is foundational to her faith in the political future. She imagines that France, ‘after all her weary wanderings’, ‘possesses, in the experience of her past calamities, an antidote against every species of despotism’.¹⁶⁶ In a surprising inversion, the ‘French youth’ are presented as an embodiment of the collective wisdom of the age:

They have imbibed the principles of the revolution, without having felt its evils [...] They know that liberty is the prize, for many of their parents have bled in the field, or perished on the scaffold. But they are too well read in modern history, of which their country has been the great theatre, to seek for liberty where it is not to be found.¹⁶⁷

She imagines that the personal experience of these inheritors of the Revolution is intimately connected with the course of history in the parents lost on the scaffold. But she also suggests that personal tragedy is tempered by the reading of history. Writing therefore enables the diffusion of principles and the dissipation of evil, as she enacts her prophecy of 1795 that ‘the good will remain written in brass – the evil will evaporate like water’.¹⁶⁸

Williams’s identification with the circle of the Girondins and her faith in the political potential of collective memory allows her to attach herself to an ongoing revolutionary history, orientate herself towards the social realities of the present, and retain her commitment to future reform. In *Souvenirs*, she dares ‘to reclaim a part of the merit belonging to the friends of liberty, for having so long defended the cause’.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Helen Maria Williams, *Letters on the Events which have Passed in France since the Restoration in 1815* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1819), pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁵ Williams, *Restoration*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Restoration*, p. 179.

¹⁶⁷ Williams, *Restoration*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁸ Williams, *Letters from France*, I, 4, 150.

¹⁶⁹ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 199. Quoted and trans. by Kennedy, in *Revolution*, p. 214.

Williams's role as the Girondin historian resembles Elizabeth Fox's self-definition as the chronicler of the Foxites. For both women, attaching the self to a communal narrative provides a sense of social belonging and public agency. Williams's aspiration that 'maybe sometimes the voice of my heart is heard by the heart of those who read me' also echoes the desires of Methodists Mary Fletcher and Mary Tooth for an intimate connection with their readership.¹⁷⁰ But, in contrast to Elizabeth Fox's assimilation within a political legacy or Mary Tooth's incorporation within a spiritual fellowship, Williams's capacity for creative self-expression is never overwhelmed by her representative status as one of the 'friends of liberty'. In the preface to her collected works *Poems* (1823), Williams comments on France:

The great event of the Revolution has had an influence in this country on the whole existence of man; on his thoughts, his principles, his manners, and his taste; and no doubt Poetry has been subject to its irresistible ascendancy. From the natural connection that exists between our feelings and our situation, a new state of society must have led the vivid imagination of the poet to new images, and his heart, tremblingly awake to every human sympathy, must have felt new emotions.¹⁷¹

Williams suggests that the Revolution is synonymous with a transformation in personal identity. She connects selfhood to poetic form by imagining herself as a repository for the political potential of the past and suggests that she is able to give these values voice in the literary present.¹⁷² In her self-conception as a member of an unrealised future community, Williams resembles Ann Freeman and Mary Robinson. However, in contrast to these oppositional selves, the source of Williams's political and artistic authority is her collective identity as a member of the Girondin. This self-construction as a spirit of the age enables Williams to produce a continuous narrative of personal and political experience, despite the upheaval of the period. For, unlike the belated 'survivor' Elizabeth Fox or the 'relic' Mary Fletcher, Williams asserts the continuing relevance of the revolutionary politics of the Girondin and the literary persona of the woman of feeling into the nineteenth century.

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 199. Quoted and trans. by Kennedy, in *Revolution*, p. 214.

¹⁷¹ Helen Maria Williams, *Poems on Various Subjects; with Introductory Remarks on the Present State of Science and Literature in France* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), xix.

¹⁷² Kelly, *Women, Writing, Revolution*, p. 219.

Living in a Historical Present: Grace Dalrymple Elliott, Charlotte West, and the Legacy of the French Revolution

The royalist writers Grace Dalrymple Elliott and Charlotte West resist the models of political identity, revolutionary community, and historiography articulated in the life writing of Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft. In her *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution*, Elliott presents a political identity based on aristocratic friendship and sexuality and locates herself within the cosmopolitan milieu of a pre-revolutionary era. In contrast, in *A Ten Years Residence in France*, West's political authority is grounded in her identity as an English Protestant middling-class woman of feeling on a mission to save Britain from the threat of radicalism. For Williams and Wollstonecraft, life writing is a means of self-revision, political intervention, and social transformation, which allows them to become the revolutionary heroines of a collective political history. However, in contrast to this empowering union of personal fate and political progress, Elliott and West struggle to reconcile present circumstances and personal memory. Their life writing reinforces Maurice Halbwachs's observation that 'even at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu'.¹⁷³ In her *Journal*, Elliott negotiates between her past identity as the courtesan of a pro-revolutionary royal regicide and her present position precariously placed within a courtly circle. She imagines herself as the heroine and historian of a declining elite, in an autobiography coloured by nostalgia. In the *Residence*, West experiences a radical disjunction between her identity as the counter-revolutionary heroine and the conservative patriot, in a text perpetually on the verge of collapse. Therefore, in their dramatisations of the tension between self-expression and representative selfhood, Elliott's *Journal* and West's *Residence* return to the questions with which this study began.

Grace Dalrymple Elliott and the Spectre of Revolution

Grace Dalrymple Elliott's politics is characteristic of her aristocratic milieu that understood royalism as an expression of personal affiliation rather than principle. In

¹⁷³ Halbwachs, p. 49.

her presentation of the Revolution as the product of personal motivation and group intrigue, she anticipates the work of the twentieth-century historian Lewis Namier. She denies the role of ideas in political and social transformation and takes 'the mind out of history', as A. J. P. Taylor expresses it in his critique of Namier.¹⁷⁴ Like Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Fox, Elliott was a member of the *demi monde* and an associate of the Foxite Whigs. This connection was established by the birth of her illegitimate daughter in 1781, who was allegedly fathered by the Prince of Wales, and it was confirmed from 1784 by her role as courtesan to the committed Foxite and cousin of Louis XVI, Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orléans. However, Orléans's emergence as a pro-revolutionary and regicidal royal by the end of 1793 threatened Elliott's attachment to the aristocracy and undermined her royalist identity. Writing retrospectively in her *Journal*, she attempts to establish the Duke as a man of pleasure and provides a self-vindication of her limited role in revolutionary events. The *Journal* can be understood as Elliott's attempt to redeem her posthumous reputation and provide a legacy for her daughter. It is therefore comparable to Robinson's *Memoirs* that was published just prior to the *Journal's* composition around 1801 to 1802.

Crucial to Elliott's defence is her self-presentation as a sentimental victim of a family tragedy rather than an eyewitness or participant in a historical and political event. Nevertheless, by opposing the compassion and humanity of women royalists to the masculine fraternity of the Republic, Elliott produces a gendered politics of Revolution. Elliott suggests that heroic suffering is a guarantee of royalist commitment and, like Robinson, she identifies with Marie-Antoinette on the basis of shared 'maternal martyrdom'.¹⁷⁵ However, she also experiences the regicidal guilt of Williams and Wollstonecraft, accepting that she is implicated in the King's death through a failure of her sexual and political influence (or 'boudoir politics'). In response to this crisis in her personal identity and self-representation, Elliott imagines herself as the self-elected historian of a cosmopolitan aristocratic milieu. She transforms her narrative of imprisonment into a prosopography and invests the prison with the values of a community under siege, in a royalist equivalent of Williams's

¹⁷⁴ A. J. P. Taylor, *A Personal History* (London: Hamilton, 1983), p. 113.

¹⁷⁵ Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 99.

revolutionary prison society. This textual restoration of a threatened social order provides consolation for the past and self-affirmation in the present, establishing Elliott within a cosmopolitan community of survivors in this auspicious moment of national reconciliation during the Peace of Amiens. However, despite the *Journal's* status as an intervention in the present, the text is overwhelmed by feelings of nostalgia. Unlike Robinson, Elliott ultimately fails to reinvent herself in response to a changing moral and political climate and appears 'out of time' in a personal history haunted by the past.

'Dally the Tall' and 'the despicable duke of Orleans'

Elliott's *Journal* is a self-vindication addressed to an elite community and a nostalgic portrait of a social order in decline, as she attempts to preserve and revive the values of her francophilic and aristocratic milieu. Her family origins partly explain her cosmopolitanism, as she was born in Scotland around 1754 and educated in a convent on the Continent.¹⁷⁶ She may also have been raised in a Jacobite household, as her niece Lady Shelley remarks in her diary that during the 1790s the family were 'all strong Jacobites'.¹⁷⁷ Elliott's early marriage to the doctor John Eliot (whose illustrious clients included Sophia Baddeley, Mary Robinson, and the Prince of Wales) ended in divorce in 1776, following Elliott's affair with Lord Valentia.¹⁷⁸ The separation confirmed her reputation as a *demi-rep* ('a woman whose character is only half reputable' (OED)). By August 1778 the *Town and Country Magazine* was openly referring to her as a 'paphian votary' (a popular term for a courtesan) and her nickname of 'Dally the Tall' also dates from around this time.¹⁷⁹ As a courtesan, Elliott was associated with the elite circle of 'continental Whiggery'.¹⁸⁰ She shared lovers with Elizabeth Fox and Mary Robinson throughout the 1770s and 1780s, including the Duke of Chartres (the future Duke of Orléans), the Prince of Wales, and Lord Cholmondeley. The Duke of Orléans was a member of the 'English Francophile

¹⁷⁶ Jo Manning, *My Lady Scandalous: The Amazing Life and Outrageous Times of Grace Dalrymple Elliott, Royal Courtesan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 27.

¹⁷⁷ Lady Shelley, *The Diary of Frances Lady Shelley 1787-1817*, ed. by Richard Edgcumbe, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1912), I, 4.

¹⁷⁸ Eighteenth-century sources indicate different spellings for the surname of Grace Dalrymple Elliott and her husband John Eliot.

¹⁷⁹ *Town and Country Magazine; or, Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment*, August 1778, p. 345; and Horace Bleackley, *Ladies Fair and Frail: Sketches of the Demi-Monde during the Eighteenth Century* (London: John Lane, 1909), p. 217.

¹⁸⁰ Eagles, p. 11.

fraternity' and during the 1780s he made numerous visits to London 'mixing politics with pleasure' in the circle of Charles James Fox and the Prince of Wales.¹⁸¹ The Duke's 'Anglomania' was notorious, evident in Elliott's claim in the *Journal* that he 'assured me he had always envied the life of an English country gentleman' and 'would willingly change his lot and all his fortune for a small estate in England'.¹⁸² Paradoxically, Elliott's relationship with a French Prince of the Blood reinforced her English national identity and obscured her Scottish and potentially Jacobite and Catholic origins.

Eagles argues that 'French Whiggery' was threatened by the events of the Revolution from 1792 onwards, a development exemplified by Orléans's public transformation into a royal regicide.¹⁸³ As a public figure committed to personal and political liberalism and notorious for his disagreements with the King and Queen, the Duke was a natural focus for opposition to the French court. During the 1780s he turned the Palais-Royal 'into the most spectacular habitat for pleasure and politics in Europe' and the 'unofficial center of opposition'.¹⁸⁴ This oppositional community consisted of journalists, intellectuals, and members of the literati, such as Desmoulins, Mirabeau, and Choderlos de Laclos.¹⁸⁵ In her *Letters from France* of 1790, Helen Maria Williams describes this blend of politics, fashion, commerce, and popular culture:

The walks under the piazzas are crowded with people: and in the upper part of the square, tents are placed, where coffee, lemonade, ices, &c. are sold. Nothing is heard but the voice of mirth; nothing is seen but cheerful faces: and I have no doubt that the Palais Royal is, upon the whole, one of the merriest scenes under the sun.¹⁸⁶

However, writing in 1793, Mary Wollstonecraft presents a rather different picture. She declares the Duke of Orléans 'despicable' and the Palais Royal 'a very superb square, yet the last in which a person of any delicacy, not to mention decorum, or morality, would choose to reside'.¹⁸⁷ These contrasting responses are consistent with

¹⁸¹ Eagles, p. 153; and Evarts Seelye Scudder, *Prince of the Blood* (London: Collins, 1937), p. 116.

¹⁸² Scudder, p. 114; and Grace Dalrymple Elliott, *Journal of my Life during the French Revolution* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), p. 100. In this section, further references to the *Journal* are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁸³ Eagles, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸⁴ Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1989; repr. 2004), pp. 114 and 323.

¹⁸⁵ Schama, pp. 223-24.

¹⁸⁶ Williams, *Letters from France*, I, I, 77-78.

¹⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, pp. 198 and 207.

Williams's openness to a political culture of performance and pleasure and Wollstonecraft's commitment to 'decorum, or morality'. However, their rival accounts also indicate the changing political fortunes of the Duke between Williams's view in 1790 and Wollstonecraft's account in 1793.

The Duke of Orléans entered public life as leader of the opposition faction in the Assembly of Notables and was among the liberal nobles who joined the Third Estate in 1789. His role in inciting and directing popular disturbances is highly debated, particularly the March on Versailles during the October Days of 1789 (for which Elliott provides the Duke with an alibi in her *Journal* (pp. 37-38)).¹⁸⁸ Orléans was elected to the National Convention in September 1792, where he sat with the Jacobins and adopted the title of Citizen Égalité. But in the paranoid and divided political atmosphere of Paris he became a focus of suspicion for both royalists and republicans, despite voting for the death of his cousin Louis XVI in January 1793. He was arrested as a counter-revolutionary following his son's desertion with General Dumouriez and he was executed on 6 November 1793. This narrative placed a politics dependent upon aristocratic, royalist, and familial affiliation under strain and cast Elliott in the paradoxical position of courtesan to a pro-revolutionary regicide. However, through rewriting public history as personal recollection she is able to assert what she 'dare hardly say' (p. 181) and presents a retrospective lament for the fate of the Duke of Orléans in the *Journal*.

The 'man of pleasure' and the 'slave of faction'

In the *Journal*, Elliott deconstructs the public icon of Philippe-Égalité and seeks to establish the Duke of Orléans as 'a man of pleasure' (p. 27) adrift in the political realm. She argues that he 'never could bear trouble or business of any kind' and 'never read or did anything but amuse himself' (p. 27). She presents the Duke's opposition to the throne as the result of his personal hostility to the King rather than a principled stance. She notes that after the Duke was addressed with 'great harshness' by the King he 'became more violent in politics' (pp. 25-26). Wollstonecraft concurs with Elliott's interpretation, suggesting in *An Historical and Moral View of the*

¹⁸⁸ George Rudé, *The French Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), pp. 54-57; and Scudder, p. 188.

French Revolution that ‘the duke of Orleans, piqued at the royal family, took great pains to spread abroad opinions, which were far from being congenial with his own’.¹⁸⁹ Like Elliott, she foregrounds the Duke’s reputation as ‘a man of pleasure’, characterising him as ‘the grand sultan’ of a ‘den of iniquity’ and imagining the Palais-Royal as an entirely depoliticised space.¹⁹⁰ In their portraits of the Duke, both Elliott and Wollstonecraft seem to deny the continuum between particular interests and political principles. But for Wollstonecraft the Duke’s self-interest and sexual libertinism are evidence of his moral bankruptcy, whereas, for Elliott they are the guarantee of his political innocence.

Elliott’s desire to separate the spheres of politics and pleasure in her defence of the Duke is perpetually undermined by her belief in the intimate relationship between political power and sexual influence. This tension is evident in Elliott’s portrayal of her fellow courtesan Madame de Buffon. She claims that at the beginning of the Revolution the Duke was ‘very madly in love with Madame de Buffon, driving her about all day in a curricule, and at all the *spectacles* in the evening; therefore he could not possibly be planning conspiracies’ (p. 27). Yet, elsewhere she imagines herself involved in a politicised *ménage à trois*, competing for the Duke’s royalist soul:

I always warned the Duke, and told him how it would all end; and I have most awfully to lament the little influence I possessed over him; [...] I flattered myself that he would leave it all; but he went from me to Madame de Buffon, of whom he was very fond, but whose politics, I am sorry to say, were those of Laclos and Merlin, whom he always found at her house, where he dined with them every day. (pp. 30-31)

Through the figure of Madame de Buffon, boudoir politics is retained as a powerful mode of female influence. However, Elliott’s self-defence depends upon her ability to establish herself as the unheeded prophet, reminiscent of Mary Wollstonecraft’s self-identification as Cassandra. Elliott separates herself from the politics of the bedroom and the dinner table, recurrently staging her interactions with the Duke in apparently neutral spaces. She recalls a visit to the Duke’s residence at Monceau in July 1789:

I found Madame de Buffon with him, and as her politics and mine were very different, I called the Duke into the garden, and we walked there till two o’clock. I entreated him on my knees to go directly to Versailles. and not to leave the King. (p. 22)

¹⁸⁹ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁰ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, p. 207.

The garden seems to be outside the grip of factionalism, as Elliott seeks to portray royalism as a natural affiliation based on true friendship. The Duke reinforces this portrait in his own words, allegedly commenting that in Elliott's 'drawing-room' it 'seems easy' to disentangle himself, whereas outside he is 'no longer master of myself or of my name' (p. 101).

Throughout the *Journal*, Elliott suggests that support for a political faction is synonymous with a loss of personal autonomy. The leaders of the Orléanist party are dehumanised in their portrayal as 'horrible creatures' and 'monsters' (p. 26), while the revolutionary crowd is presented as a 'mob' or a group of 'wretches' (p. 58). Elliott's description of her encounter with the French people on 12 July 1789 highlights the difference between her aristocratic politics of particular interests and Williams's reformist politics of universal sympathy:

We saw many groups assembled in all the streets near the Tuileries and Place Louis Quinze. I was very anxious about the Duke's situation, and wished much to know the public opinion about him; we therefore mixed in the groups, and of course heard different sides of the question: some were very violent in the Duke's favour, others as violent against him, these latter accusing him of wanting to dethrone the King. (pp. 21-22)

Elliott's conception of the revolutionary crowd as a heterogeneous mixture of competing interest groups contrasts with Williams's conception of the Festival of the Federation as a moment of collective self-transcendence grounded in common humanity. In her self-construction as a political spy, Elliott disassociates herself from the crowd and translates espionage into an expression of personal loyalty rather than treachery or duplicity. She jettisons the deceit and seduction of a corrupt feminine politics onto her characterisation of Madame de Buffon. But nonetheless, she deploys a politics of 'artificiality, ornamentation, and disguise' associated with 'public women of the absolutist public sphere'.¹⁹¹ This approach presents a striking contrast to Wollstonecraft's desire for rational transparency and Williams's sentimental politics transmitted from 'heart to heart'.

¹⁹¹ Landes, p. 147.

‘Sheet by sheet as it was written by her’

Elliott’s memories of the Duke of Orléans coexist in the *Journal* with a desire to liberate herself from the taint of her revolutionary past. Elliott’s editor Richard Bentley asserts in his preface that the *Journal* was written ‘at the express desire of his Majesty King George the Third’ (ix). He alleges that Elliott’s medical attendant conveyed the work to Windsor ‘sheet by sheet as it was written by her during her residence at Twickenham’ (ix-x). This claim, reinforced by Bentley in a letter to *The Times* of 28 January 1859, seems dubious.¹⁹² George III suffered an attack relating to his porphyria from February to March 1801, generally avoided contact with his son’s mistresses, and was a close friend of Elliott’s ex-husband.¹⁹³ However, Elliott may have circulated the manuscript amongst her social circle, a possibility hinted at by Hugh Farmar in his history of the Bentinck family:

This book, with its account of the sufferings of the French royal family and nobility, had created a considerable sensation. As its instalments, privately circulated, appeared it had been avidly read by George III, and by all the English of rank who might expect to suffer if Jacobinism were to gain a foothold in this country.¹⁹⁴

The composition and circulation of the manuscript seems to have coincided with the Peace of Amiens in 1801 to 1802. During this momentary hiatus in Anglo-French conflict the majority of the *bon ton* were visiting Paris, including the Devonshires, Chomondeleys, Hollands, and Foxes. In the *Journal*, Elliott seeks to capitalise on this moment of cross-Channel connection in order to effect social reintegration. This agenda is revealed in her recurrent impulse to address the present:

My conduct at that time is well known to all the King and Queen’s friends, and by the French Princes now in England, who will do me justice, though they know the attachment I had for the Duke of Orleans. (p. 30)

Lady Shelley’s diary records the apparent success of Elliott’s social rehabilitation. She notes that as the mother of a ‘royal’ daughter Elliott was ‘received, and courted’ by ‘all the men of *ton*, and many women’ who desired ‘access to the Prince’s favour’.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Richard Bentley, *The Times*, 28 January 1859, p. 4.

¹⁹³ Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, ‘The “Insanity” of King George III: A Classic Case of Porphyria’, in *Porphyria – A Royal Malady* (London: British Medical Association, 1968), pp. 1-16 (p. 10).

¹⁹⁴ Hugh Farmar, *A Regency Elopement* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), p. 21.

¹⁹⁵ Shelley, I, 44-45.

Elliott may have imagined the text as a legacy for her daughter, comparable to Mary Robinson's *Memoirs* in which a posthumous self-vindication is also a filial inheritance. On Elliott's return to England at the end of the 1790s, her daughter Georgiana Augusta Frederica Seymour was living at Chomondeley Castle under the guardianship of Elliott's former lover Lord Chomondeley. She remained there until her marriage to Lord Charles Bentinck (son of the Duke of Portland) in 1808.¹⁹⁶ During her residence in England, Elliott maintained only limited contact with her daughter, who died in 1813. However, Elliott's will that was dictated in the final months of her life in Ville d'Avray (where she was lodging with the family of the local mayor after returning to France in 1814) includes an address to her granddaughter Georgina Bentinck:

I in my last moments pray for her happiness and for that of her kind and respectable protectors and if my blessing is all I can leave her may she ever be good and grateful and may God Almighty protect her and all the Cholmondeley Family and may we all meet in heaven if our blessed Lord forgives my sins and disobedience to his Commandments. These shall be my last Prayers.¹⁹⁷

These evocative final prayers demonstrate Elliott's lifelong displacement in the lives of her daughter and granddaughter by more 'respectable protectors'. She also reveals her anxiety that the 'sins' of the past may exclude her from the family circle even in the afterlife. Read in this light, the *Journal* becomes an act of atonement and a familial address that finds public expression only after Elliott's granddaughter published the manuscript in 1859.¹⁹⁸

'I could have mounted the scaffold with pleasure'

In the *Journal*, Elliott presents herself as the heroine of a historical romance and the sentimental victim of a political tragedy, at once the champion of the aristocracy and a double for the martyred French Queen. In a dramatic account of her midnight escape from Paris in August 1789, she recalls that when she reached her home at Meudon 'my feet were covered with blood, having no soles to my shoes or stockings' (p. 69).

¹⁹⁶ Georgiana abandoned her mother's name of 'Elliott' in favour of 'Seymour' around this period. Manning, pp. 309-10.

¹⁹⁷ The will is held in the National Archives and is quoted in Manning, p. 355.

¹⁹⁸ The manuscript was sold to the publisher Richard Bentley and the book appeared at a price of ten shillings and six pence, making it one of the most expensive in Bentley's catalogue for that year. Manning, p. 367. For an account of the manuscript's provenance, see Richard Bentley, *The Times*, 28 January 1859, p. 4.

The bleeding feet are evidence of the radical attack on the values of aristocratic femininity and a mark of Elliott's suffering as the victim of the Revolution. However, they are also a symbol of resistance and a testament to the courage of the royalist heroine. Dorinda Outram argues that 'to the degree that power in the old regime was ascribed to women, the Revolution was committed to an anti-feminine rhetoric, which posed great problems for any women seeking public authority'.¹⁹⁹ However, Elliott is able to exploit the misogynistic discourse of the Republic, opposing the femininity of the royalist heroine to the masculine factionalism and inhumanity of the Revolution. Elliott echoes Williams's conclusion that the Terror represents an attack on human connection, as she comments that in the streets 'two people, the most intimate, would not have dared to stop and speak' (pp. 123-24). Personal expression is assimilated into a public narrative of revolutionary conspiracy in this 'politicization of the everyday'.²⁰⁰ For Elliott remarks that 'even in your own rooms you felt frightened. If you laughed, you were accused of joy at some bad news the republic had had; if you cried, they said that you regretted their success' (p. 124). As a consequence, autonomy is attainable only in assertions of humanity, sympathy, and royalist martyrdom, exemplified by Elliott's claim that 'so strong was my abhorrence of the horrid acts which were being committed, that I am certain I could have mounted the scaffold with pleasure' (p. 92).

This attraction to the heroism of death is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's 'envy' of the mothers 'killed with their children' or Williams's identification with the martyrs of the guillotine.²⁰¹ However, Elliott's conception of heroic resistance is more diverse than Williams or Wollstonecraft's commitment to republican stoicism, evident in her account of the death of Madame du Barry (the former courtesan of Louis XV):

She showed very little courage on the scaffold; yet, I believe, had every one made as much resistance as she did, Robespierre would not have dared to put so many to death, for Madame Du Barri's screams, they told me, frightened and alarmed the mob. (p. 157)

Elliott is open to the possibility of the political power of spectacle. However, she also fears 'being made a show for the horrid crowds' (p. 175), as exposure to the public

¹⁹⁹ Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 125.

²⁰⁰ Hunt, *Politics*, p. 56.

²⁰¹ *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 283; and Kennedy, 'Guillotine', pp. 102 and 105.

gaze potentially contaminates personal integrity and threatens the social hierarchy.²⁰² Therefore, in her personal fantasy of death, Elliott determines 'to try and imitate so great and good an example' (pp. 177-78) as Marie-Antoinette rather than emulating the arresting performance of her fellow courtesan Madame du Barry.

Dorinda Outram argues that Marie-Antoinette represented the ultimate embodiment of corrupt female influence in the public sphere, evident at her trial in 1793 where boudoir politics 'were seen both as a cause of the weaknesses of the old regime, and as a justification for the Revolution itself'.²⁰³ However, Elliott assimilates the Queen into her self-defence, implying that Marie-Antoinette's petticoat influence over Louis XVI was as limited as her own ability to manage the Duke. She claims that before the flight to Varennes the Queen remarks, "I fear we are doing wrong, but you know that I cannot persuade" (p. 72). In her rescue of the Marquis de Champcenetz (governor of the Tuileries Palace), Elliott simultaneously identifies with the Queen as a revolutionary victim and enacts a royalist rescue. She secretes Champcenetz between the mattresses of her bed and remains within it, while the domiciliary guards (or 'ruffians') 'pulled my maid's bed and all the servants' beds to pieces, running their bayonets into the mattresses' (pp. 92-93). This melodramatic scene is reminiscent of Edmund Burke's notorious description of the March on Versailles of 1790, when 'a band of cruel ruffians and assassins' 'rushed into the chamber of the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed'.²⁰⁴ However, in this instance, the body of the defiant British woman is substituted for the absent French Queen. Through the deployment of her sexuality, Elliott translates the Revolution into her own terms and addresses the guards in a language of polite sociability. The episode concludes when 'at last the monsters advised me to take some rest, and wished me good night' (p. 96).

Elliott and Robinson's royal identifications are made possible by Marie-Antoinette's 'strategic position on the cusp between public and private', as Lynn Hunt expresses

²⁰² Outram, pp. 110-11.

²⁰³ Outram, p. 125.

²⁰⁴ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), p. 62.

it.²⁰⁵ However, this fantasy of intimacy is reinforced by Elliott's conception of royalism as an extension of personal friendship. Mary Sheriff argues that in the Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun portrait, *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise* of 1783 (reproduced below), 'Marie-Antoinette represents herself not in terms of a position at court, but in terms of a position in a larger society – as a fashionable woman' in a self-portrayal that 'defied the sacrosanct laws of French court etiquette'.²⁰⁶ This defiance is thematised in Elliott's portrayal of Marie-Antoinette as a woman who 'imbibed a taste for fashions and public amusements', 'attached herself to younger people, whose taste was more suited to her own', and had her 'most innocent actions [...] represented in a bad light' (p. 41). However, this defence of the Queen is also a displaced self-portrait in which Elliott evokes her own fall from grace as a young woman married to an elderly husband and criticised by the press.

In addition to her interest in the woman of fashion, Elliott presents Marie-Antoinette as an image of virtue in distress. This portrayal is reminiscent of Robinson's meditations on the Queen's private selfhood, maternal virtues, and familial loyalty in her poetry. In a visual encounter with the Queen at the theatre, Elliott presents herself as the sympathetic witness of an 'unfortunate mother's tears' (p. 65). Elsewhere, she foregrounds their shared maternity, recording Marie-Antoinette's interest in her royal daughter Georgiana Seymour:

Her Majesty had been good enough to think her a beautiful child, and to take great notice of her when she was about three years old, at St. Cloud, and had sent the Duke de Liancourt for her, and kept her upon her knee all the time their Majesties were at dinner. From that moment I always felt myself obliged to the Queen for her kindness to my child. (p. 40)

In Robinson's *Memoirs*, the Duke of Orléans is commissioned by the Queen to request the loan of the author's miniature of the Prince of Wales in return for a netted purse. This transaction foregrounds sexuality and finance and returns Robinson to the public stage. In Elliott's *Journal*, the Duke de Liancourt is sent for the Prince of Wales's child, in an exchange that establishes royal connection on the basis of maternal identity rather than courtly seduction. These moments of convergence

²⁰⁵ Lynn Hunt, 'The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution', in *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, ed. by Dena Goodman (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 117-38 (p. 121).

²⁰⁶ Mary D. Sheriff, 'The Portrait of the Queen', in *Marie-Antoinette* (see Hunt, above), pp. 45-71 (p. 59).



Figure 2: Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Marie-Antoinette en Chemise* (1783)

present a stark contrast to Wollstonecraft's portrayal of Marie-Antoinette as a corrupt and debauched aristocrat. For both Robinson and Elliott remain open to an aristocratic feminine politics that grounds women's public influence in their sexuality.²⁰⁷

'All that illusion was over'

Elliott's carefully constructed identity as a royalist heroine is dangerously undermined by the death of Louis XVI. In her response to regicide, Elliott does not share Williams and Wollstonecraft's intellectual desire to 'lose sight of the individual sufferer, to meditate upon the destiny of mankind'.²⁰⁸ Instead, she portrays Louis unambiguously as a father to the nation and 'the most virtuous and best of kings', who is 'murdered' by his disloyal subjects (pp. 112-14). However, Elliott's association with the Duke of Orléans inevitably implicates her in the King's death. She interprets the Duke's vote in favour of execution as a betrayal of family duty, aristocratic politics, and personal friendship. She claims that the Duke 'had pledged himself to me in the most solemn manner that nothing should induce him to vote, unless it should be for the King's deliverance' (p. 114). This breach of faith transforms the psychic and physical landscape of Paris, as she notes that 'every place now seemed dreary and bloody to me' (p. 120).

On the evening of the execution, in a moment strongly reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's self-dramatisation as the figure of Macbeth, Elliott describes her feelings of complicity with the act of regicide:

I did not dare sleep in my room alone. I desired my maid to watch with me all night, and we kept up a great light and prayed. I could not sleep. The image of the innocent King was constantly before me. I don't think that it was possible to have felt even a family calamity more than I did the King's death. Till that moment I had always flattered myself that the Duke of Orleans was misled, and saw things in a wrong light; now, however, all that illusion was over. (pp. 120-21)

Elliott does not simply adopt the loyalist trope of the 'family calamity' to express the King's death, but literally understands it as a domestic drama and experiences it as a personal tragedy. The execution produces an inward revolution, in which she is

²⁰⁷ Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 80-81.

²⁰⁸ Williams, *Letters from France*, 1, 3, 2.

stripped of an 'illusion' and is forced to reevaluate both her lover and her past experience. She is suspended between her unique status as an intimate of the Duke, such that 'nobody can have an idea of my sufferings', and her desire to align herself with 'every honest person in Paris' (p. 121). Like Williams and Wollstonecraft, Elliott experiences a crisis in her self-representation and narrative history as a consequence of the King's death. From this point on, the eyewitness report of the *Journal* collapses into silent evasion. On the day of the execution she notes that from Meudon 'with a glass I could have seen the Place Louis Quinze' (p. 122), but while she 'could have seen' she elects not to. Once Louis's death is confirmed (by her encounter with a man holding a handkerchief dipped in the King's blood) she remains 'shut up all day' and 'heard nothing from Paris, nor did I wish to hear' (p. 123). The death also destroys her persistent faith in prophecy. Most noticeably, her reflections on what 'could' and 'would' have happened are replaced by a resignation to the course of events, evident in her comment on the Queen's execution that 'nothing now surprised us' (p. 177).

Elliott's response to personal and political disillusionment is reminiscent of Williams's strategy in her *Letters from France*. Royalist values and aristocratic affiliation are destroyed by the Republic and betrayed by the Duke of Orléans, but Elliott invests the revolutionary prisons with the values of her former milieu. Outside the prison the aristocratic social order is overturned, as Elliott notes that 'the playhouses were filled with none but Jacobins and the lowest set of common women. The deputies were in all the best boxes, with infamous women in red caps and dressed as figures of Liberty' (p. 129). In the theatre boxes the feminised icon of the Revolution symbolically and literally usurps the figure of the courtesan. However, in her account of the revolutionary tribunal, Elliott restores the social hierarchy. While she is waiting in a crowd of two hundred defendants, the brother of a woman who 'used to wash my laces' (p. 142) offers Elliott a chair (a gift which she happily relinquishes to two countesses).

At times, Elliott's ideal community is reminiscent of Williams's prison society that is founded on affective relationships and salon sociability. Elliott comments that in the prison 'common misfortune had made us sincere, even romantic friends, and we were always ready to die for one another' (p. 175). Her sentimental community bridges religious, national, and political divides. In the Recollets she forms a friendship with

the English philosopher and atheist Dr Gem²⁰⁹ and in the Carmes she becomes attached to the French republican General Hoche.²¹⁰ In a moment reminiscent of Mary Robinson's encounter with Sophia Baddeley in 1780, Elliott recalls that the former courtesan Madame du Barry 'used to sit on my bed for hours, telling me anecdotes of Louis XV. and the Court' (p. 156). However, in contrast to Williams's impulse to invest the sympathetic community of the prison with democratic values, Elliott constructs the prison on the basis of class solidarity and rebuilds an elite social network recently disrupted by politics and war.

Commentators on the *Journal* note that Elliott's impulse to fictionalise is at its most acute in her account of the period of her imprisonment.²¹¹ This combination of personal fantasy and self-vindication are consistent with John Bender's characterisation of the mid-eighteenth-century prison as a 'liminal space' in which 'new patterns of life could be formulated'.²¹² Elliott mirrors the self-representational strategies of Madame Roland, evoking an idealised image of femininity in an attempt to vindicate her posthumous reputation.²¹³ She presents herself as a Christian philanthropist, darning stockings for an elderly prisoner, acting as a confessor to 'a poor Jew' (p. 168), and claiming that she found all her 'comfort in religion' (p. 195). She becomes an advocate of marital fidelity and family unity, attempting to convince Alexandre Beauharnais (the philandering first husband of Josephine Bonaparte) to 'spare his wife's feelings' (p. 190) and end his extra-marital infatuation with Madame de Custine. In this atmosphere of flirtation and infidelity, Elliott ironically becomes the defender of companionate marriage. She therefore constructs herself in opposition to the Republic, which ensured that husbands were 'forced from their wives' arms' (p. 194).

²⁰⁹ The diary of James Harris confirms that Dr Gem and Elliott were imprisoned together in the Recollets. *Diaries and Correspondence of James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury*, ed. by 3rd Earl of Malmesbury, 4 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1844), III, 304.

²¹⁰ *The Times* review of the *Journal* suggests that if General Hoche 'was sent to the Carmes at all' he 'seems more likely to have left it before the date indicated'. *The Times*, 27 January 1859, p. 8.

²¹¹ Bleackley, pp. 234-36. Elliott's name cannot be found on the registers of any of the prisons in which she claims to have been held. However, Jo Manning stresses the inaccuracy of prison records during this chaotic period. Manning, p. 379. *The Times* speculates that Elliott may have been imprisoned under a false name. *The Times*, 27 January, 1859, p. 8.

²¹² John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 27.

²¹³ Scheffler, pp. 99-100.

Elliott's fantasy of an aristocratic community preserved within the prison walls and her self-reinvention as a feminine ideal is as much a response to the moment of the *Journal's* composition as a depiction of the revolutionary past. Robin Eagles argues that 'the Peace of Amiens offered a reprieve' for 'continental Whiggery', even if ultimately it 'was seen to have failed' once the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars set in.²¹⁴ As a consequence, Elliott's *Journal* is both an assertion of the values of a European aristocracy and a nostalgic lament for an elite community whose social and political influence was in decline. The diary of Lady Shelley records an image of Elliott at the beginning of the nineteenth century 'dressed in the indecent style of the French republican period', adorned with 'rouge', and perfumed with 'musk'.²¹⁵ She appears as an exotic and eroticised figure, but she is also the relic of a former era and an embodiment of a past moment. Elliott attempts to distance herself from the dangerous liaisons of the Revolution that threaten her royalist identity. But she also seeks to establish herself within a belated cosmopolitan community of survivors that, to take Helen Maria Williams's expression, 'throws a line of connexion across the divided world.'²¹⁶

To 'Rally Round the Throne': Charlotte West, a Female Patriot and a Counter-Revolutionary Heroine

In *A Ten Years Residence in France* (1821), Charlotte West rejects both the secular and cosmopolitan citizenship advocated by Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft and the sexualised conception of political agency articulated by Grace Dalrymple Elliott. Instead, she combines political, religious, and national identity and imagines herself on a mission of political salvation. She adopts the persona of the female prophet, and blends sentimental, military, and spiritual imagery in her writing in terms reminiscent of the Quaker Catharine Phillips. In addition, in her claim that Christian fellowship enables national unity and class consolidation, she evokes a model of social belonging that is comparable to Mary Fletcher's conception of Methodism as the rivers that 'flow from heart to heart'.²¹⁷ West suggests that she is

²¹⁴ Eagles, pp. 10-11.

²¹⁵ Shelley, I, 42.

²¹⁶ Williams, *Letters from France*, I, 1, 222.

²¹⁷ 'Autobiography of Mrs Fletcher', Fletcher-Tooth, Box 23, MS I, 35.

authorised to speak by her role as the witness of events in France. But her memoir is ultimately a response to the heightened momentum of British radicalism during the 1810s and the precarious position of George IV as an unpopular and newly crowned monarch.²¹⁸ She therefore puts personal experience into public service against the forces of radicalism and transforms a private history into a defence of the realm. West's attachment to the crown is distinct from Grace Dalrymple Elliott or Mary Robinson's identification with the person of the French Queen. Instead, her royalism is shaped by her sense of herself as a loyal subject, historical witness, woman writer, and defender of the existing social order. However, despite the apparent orthodoxy of her position, West struggles with the inherent contradiction of speaking as a woman of propriety on a public platform. She attempts to cast herself as the female patriot and identifies with the Protestant Establishment. But nonetheless, her conservative self-image is perpetually threatened by the persona of the counter-revolutionary heroine, who revels in the liberations of the 1790s and the textual pleasures of life writing.

Moral legislator and Christian soldier

Charlotte West's *Residence* presents the eyewitness report of an English Everywoman 'swept away' in revolutionary events.²¹⁹ She comments that the *Residence* is 'my first. (And in all probability my last) Essay' occasioned by 'the occurrences of the times' (i-iii). Financial need may have provided a further incentive to write, given the list of sixty-four subscribers at the beginning of the work and West's claim that she and her husband travelled to Châlons-sur-Marne in 1787 'having no other motive or object in view (like many of the present day) than economy' (ii). The narrative also reveals West's social aspirations, as she presents the village of Pierré as 'a little Paris' (p. 4) and suggests that the area was populated by 'an elegant and enlightened society' (p. 1). Writing in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, West accounts for the apparent treachery of expatriation and claims that tourism has reinforced her patriotism. She comments that she 'returned to dear England with a much greater love of my country

²¹⁸ For a discussion of the unpopularity of George IV and the negative publicity surrounding Queen Caroline's trial in 1820, see Flora Fraser, *The Unruly Queen: The Life of Queen Caroline* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 404-08.

²¹⁹ Charlotte West, *A Ten Years' Residence in France, during the Severest Part of the Revolution; from the Year 1787 to 1797* (London: William Sams, 1821), ii. In this section, further references to the *Residence* are given after quotations in the text.

than before I left it, and a much higher esteem for its laws and the administration of them' (p. 99). However, beyond the period of her residence that lasted from 1787 to 1797, Charlotte West is a shadowy figure and the status of her text as history or fiction remains uncertain.²²⁰ This ambiguity is evident in Jonathan David Gross's *ODNB* entry, which observes that 'it is not known whether West is using a pseudonym, or how far her exploits are fictionalized'.²²¹ West's publisher William Sams was a royal bookseller of St James's Street who had a history of publishing personal narratives, including *Military Memoirs of Four Brothers* (1829) written by a former soldier of the Napoleonic campaigns.²²² Nonetheless, doubts over West's veracity in the *Residence* are raised by her uncanny ability to appear at crucial moments in key revolutionary locations. She assists the royal family in their return from Varennes, arrives fortuitously in Paris at the moment of Louis XVI's execution, accidentally witnesses Charlotte Corday on her way to the guillotine, meets the future Josephine Bonaparte, and survives imprisonment in four different locations prior to her release in November 1794.²²³ However, West suggests that this revolutionary ubiquity authorises her identity as a historical witness, noting that 'it seemed ordained by fate, that if any thing unpleasant was going on, I was sure to come in for my share of it' (p. 92).

Anne Stott's characterisation of the politics of Hannah More as 'a moralistic, activist, Evangelically inspired conservatism' provides a suggestive description of West's position.²²⁴ In her self-presentation as a loyal subject and a good Christian, West draws on the recognised role of the female patriot. Linda Colley's work demonstrates the prominence of this figure in pro-war activism and royal celebrations. Colley argues that 'invoking woman's superior morality and virtue' created a legitimate opportunity for female citizenship, because 'it converted the *desire* to act into an

²²⁰ Charlotte West appears in the *ODNB* and in *Women in Context: Two Hundred Years of British Women Autobiographers*, ed. by Barbara Kanner and others (New York: G. K. Hall, 1997), pp. 895-96. However, in both cases the details of her life are taken exclusively from her self-presentation in the *Residence*.

²²¹ *ODNB*, Charlotte West.

²²² Thomas Fernyhough, *Military Memoirs of Four Brothers* (London: W. Sams, 1829).

²²³ West claims that she met Josephine Beauharnais and her two daughters in the autumn of 1788 in Champagne. However, Josephine had one daughter and a son and departed for Martinique on 2 July 1788, only returning to France on 29 October 1790. Andrea Stuart, *The Rose of Martinique: A Life of Napoleon's Josephine* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp. 88 and 98.

²²⁴ Anne Stott, 'Patriotism and Providence: The Politics of Hannah More', in *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat*, ed. by Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 39-55 (p. 50).

overwhelming *duty* to do so'.²²⁵ West evokes the language of duty, expressing her public intervention in terms of morality and nationalism:

When my native land is threatened (as has been lately the case) with all the horrors of a Revolution, shall I sit supinely without adding my mite for its protection, by setting forth the dreadful events I have been an eye-witness of, and a bodily sufferer under the rigorous measures of a Revolutionary Government. No! forbid it all the powers of memory, and love to my country, in whose cause every nerve feels doubly strung in her defence. (ii)

This blend of masculine militarism and feminine sentiment is reminiscent of the self-image of the Quaker Catharine Phillips, since West understands writing as a mode of national defence or 'setting forth'. Biblical imagery pervades West's history, as she imagines herself 'in the overwhelming flood of a Revolution' (ii). She expresses the analogy she perceives between Britain in 1821 and France in 1789 in apocalyptic terms, noting that 'the wheel *has* gone round, and stands *just* where it *did*, and ready to turn again by the first that shall put his hand to it' (p. 18). Her sense of an imminent revolutionary threat is a response to her immediate political context. As David Worrall demonstrates, civil unrest and radical activity dramatically escalated in the late 1810s, evident in the Spa Fields Rising in 1816, the insurrection at Bartholomew Fair and the Pentridge Rising in 1817, the St Peter's Field Massacre in 1819, and the Cato Street Conspiracy in 1820.²²⁶ In addition, revolutions in Spain, Portugal, and Italy in 1820 reinforced the impression that Europe faced a revival of radical enthusiasm. West's reading of the Revolution through a biblical framework is a rhetorical attempt to contain this threat. Helen Maria Williams compares the effect of revolutionary government to 'tremendous tempests' and 'deluging waters' that register a cataclysmic break with the past and a transformation in the social and political order.²²⁷ However, West seeks to counter the effects of the Revolution by expressing it in terms of existing mythologies, traditional forms, and repetitive cycles.²²⁸

²²⁵ Colley, p. 277.

²²⁶ David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 97-200.

²²⁷ Williams, *Letters from France*, II, 6, 116-17.

²²⁸ This analysis draws on discussions of revolutionary representation by Ronald Paulson and Steven Blakemore. It is also consistent with Hayden White's theory of 'explanation by emplotment' that suggests the form of historical writing is an additional mode of interpretation. Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 53-56; Blakemore, *Crisis*, p. 15; and Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 7-11.

West translates the Revolution into a crisis of manners and morals rather than a demand for rights and institutional reform. Unlike Elliott's *Journal*, which demonstrates the failure of aristocratic politics to confront reformist discourse, West's *Residence* is an expression of popular conservatism that is directly engaged in a confrontation with radicalism. In her apostrophe to the figure of Liberty, 'known by all, by name, but understood by few', West revises the meaning of this feminised icon. She declares 'Oh, Liberty! the love[r] of social order; the giver of wholesome laws, which protect man from man, and defend the king upon his throne, and the cobbler in his stall' (p. 17). David Eastwood argues that rewriting the rights of man as a series of obligations embodied by the existing social order was a commonplace of loyalist rhetoric during the 1790s.²²⁹ In addition, West presents cosmopolitan patriotism as a breach of social etiquette and undermines the apparent connection between French republicans and English radicals:

The English who gave in to the Revolution, who stiled themselves *French Patriots*, were most cordially detested by the French Revolutionists themselves; as they could not allow of a man's *sincerity* in *their cause*, when he abandoned and *reviled his own* country. (p. 74)

In this discursive clash, acts of translation become impossible and the Revolution is confirmed as a unique aberration that cannot be repeated on home soil. In her *Letters from France*, Williams attempts to fuse personal history and collective memory in order to preserve revolutionary principles. Whereas, in the *Residence*, West seeks to replace a shared political mythology with personal experience in order to defeat a radical threat:

Oh! could my humble endeavours and advice prevail on those who are *panting* for liberty, to read these lines, and see in their mind's eye what I have seen in reality; surely, they would stop their headlong career, and spare the blood of thousands. (p. 18)

In her appeal to the 'panting' reformers, West shares Williams's faith in the political power of sympathetic exchange. However, she rejects the ideal of a community based on human correspondence and instead confines social connection to kinship and the mutual pursuit of self-interest. In an attempt to bolster the position of George IV, she appeals to 'the nobility, and every man of property and probity' to 'rally round the

²²⁹ David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', in *British Popular Politics* (see Philp, above), pp. 146-68 (pp. 160-61).

throne and the king', claiming that 'by protecting him, they would protect their own property, themselves, and their families' (pp. 18-19).

In her address to those across the social and political spectrum, West evokes a tradition of female prophecy and imagines herself as a member of a spiritual fellowship synonymous with the body politic. This self-image is evident in her speech to a revolutionary crowd at Châlons, who threaten to set fire to her house if she and her husband do not give up the Irish soldier sheltering in their home:

It was decided, that if I went to them, they might be less inclined to insult a woman than a man, so I took courage (which, thank God, never deserted me at my need) and went to them. I had the small gate opened, and I held up my hand, and begged their attention. (I know not whether it was the idea of endeavouring to save the life of a fellow-creature and countryman, or that some benign power assisted me; but certain it is, that I was eloquent in his defence). (p. 45)

West speaks simultaneously as the female patriot motivated by compassion and moral courage and the woman preacher supported by a benign power. But her recollection of this scene from the 1790s also seems haunted by the spectre of the St Peter's Field Massacre of 1819, when a crowd assembled to hear the speech of the parliamentary reformer Henry 'Orator' Hunt and were charged by a troop of yeoman cavalry. Linda Colley characterises the Peterloo massacre as a moment when 'femaleness had conspicuously failed to ward off masculine aggression'.²³⁰ In contrast, in the *Residence*, West re-establishes the female patriot as a civilising presence. At Peterloo, a linguistic event mutates into a moment of bloodshed. However, West's image of the woman writer addressing the people in the field asserts the power of language to defuse revolutionary violence, as she reconciles the crowd and the soldier and triumphantly 'retired, amidst loud huzzas' (p. 46).

This impulse to refract memories of revolutionary events through the lens of contemporary British politics is symbolised by West's clandestine prison correspondence. She recalls 'I used to write with very wide lines in French, and interline it with English' (p. 61). In contrast to Williams's portrayal of the prison as a radical sentimental community and Elliott's image of aristocratic sociability, West's prison is grounded in the values of English Protestantism and highlights the moral

²³⁰ Colley, p. 264.

bankruptcy of the reformist cause. West recalls that while she was in La Providence in 1794 her fellow prisoner Colonel Keating ('head of the Corresponding Society in London' (p. 85)) denounces her to the authorities for singing the English national anthem. However, West rewrites the conventional terms of engagement between radicalism and the state that established Britain as a culture of resistance and surveillance during the period 1790 to 1820.²³¹ In the *Residence*, the 'barbarous' and 'unmanly' (p. 86) republican spy is established as the enemy within, siding with the state against the loyalist woman who expresses her politics in song. However, the English woman writer defeats the radical plot of the cosmopolitan patriot through her eloquent self-defence to the French authorities. Therefore, West's prison is never the liminal space permitting self-reinvention that Elliott imagines or the levelling environment that Williams desires. Instead, it is a place where the social order is restored and patriotism is rewarded, representing an ideal for England to emulate in 1821.

'That I had the pen of Shakespeare'

Elliott understands royalism as an expression of personal attachment and aristocratic kinship, whereas, West encounters the French royal family as a loyal subject and a woman writer. Unlike Williams and Wollstonecraft, she is able to fuse personal sympathy and ideological commitment in her sentimental connection to the indivisible triumvirate of 'England, her King, and Constitution' (iii). West meets the French royal family on their return to Paris after the flight to Varennes in June 1791. However, in contrast to Elliott's intimate identification with the French Queen, West's royal interaction is understood in literary terms. She laments 'Oh! that I had the pen of Shakespeare to write that night's scene; my poor pen cannot convey one thousandth part of it' (p. 23). West imagines herself as a royal spokeswoman and historian, able to protect the memory and institution of the monarchy through her eloquence. Her loyalism is repeatedly expressed in a language of sentiment. Marie-Antoinette is at once a royal martyr and a Richardsonian heroine, who 'looked up to heaven, clasped her hands together, but did not speak' (p. 23). West protects the Queen from the gaze of the mob, recalling that at a dinner in Maison-de-Lintendance 'my tears were not to be restrained, for I really sobbed aloud, till I drew the eyes of

²³¹ Worrall, pp. 2-7.

many on me, some of them not the most benign' (p. 23). In the assault of the revolutionary guards on her royalist bed, Elliott acts as the Queen's 'body double' and defuses revolutionary violence through deception and flirtation. At the dinner, West presents the sympathetic response of the woman writer as a momentary triumph of individual sensibility over collective inhumanity.

West is ultimately the defender of the monarch rather than the advocate of the heroine in distress, evident in her reaction when the Queen emerges from the chapel with the dauphin in her arms:

The soldier made a motion with his musquet, as if he would bayonet the queen or the child. I lost all presence of mind, but one, and that was to snatch the prince out of his mother's arms, and run away with him into the drawing-room. (p. 28)

Elliott's image of her child on Marie-Antoinette's knee signifies the intimacy of their connection as private individuals, whereas, West's abrupt rescue of the royal heir protects the institution of the monarchy. Yet, the professional woman writer also responds to the request of 'unfortunate Antoinette' to immortalise 'her sufferings'. West becomes the repository for royal memory in her emphatic response, 'forget thee, thou poor suffering angel! – No, never, while memory holds her place in my poor brain' (pp. 31-32).

West's record of the execution of Louis XVI is free from the ideological and emotional confusion of Williams's *Letters from France* or the self-evasions of Elliott and Wollstonecraft's narratives. For West, the metaphor of the crown and the body of the king are synonymous. In contrast to Elliott's silent withdrawal on the day of the execution, West vividly recreates the sights and sounds from her balcony on the Rue St Honoré where she locates herself in order to 'observe and contemplate the passing scene' (p. 52). Positioned on the cusp between private and public, and allowing both proximity and elevation, the balcony is an ideal space for West. She has frequent recourse to this location, as she notes that on the night of the fall of the Girondins 'I passed the whole of it on the balcony' (pp. 56-57). In her recollections of the King's death, the balcony is momentarily transformed into a theatre box:

In short, the whole of the scene before me, brought forcibly to my mind the description given by Hubert to king John, of the death of Prince Arthur, and to that I must refer my readers; but I saw realised, that which Shakespeare saw in his mind's eye only. (p. 53)

West suggests that not only does she plot the event retrospectively through a Shakespearean framework, but also experiences it as a literary incident in the moment. Her account is therefore comparable to Elliott's theatricalisation of the execution and Wollstonecraft's account of watching Louis on his way to the trial in the letter to Johnson. However, while Elliott and Wollstonecraft align themselves with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, West reveals the power of spectatorship. She no longer desires 'the pen of Shakespeare', but instead asserts the superiority of the female observing eye over the male literary imagination.

The King's death produces a crisis in the self-representations and narrative histories of Williams, Wollstonecraft, and Elliott. However, for West the role of witness to the execution confirms her literary persona as the guardian of the throne in the year of George IV's coronation. As John Barrell notes, Louis's death 'was imagined to have a more permanent propaganda value' beyond the 1790s, as a means to inculcate patriotism, religion, and a sense of duty toward the state and the monarchy.²³² West speculates that at the execution 'had he been permitted to speak to his subjects, surely there could not be a man amongst them who could have withstood his king on a scaffold, pleading to them for *protection* and *mercy*' (p. 53). West therefore asserts her faith in the power of language to transform an audience from revolutionaries to royalists and establishes the voice of the woman writer in place of the silenced King.

However, despite the apparent continuity of West's self-image, the *Residence* is founded on an inherent contradiction. West detaches herself from the models of political identity represented by Elliott (as a woman associated with the corruptions of the *ancien régime*) and Williams and Wollstonecraft (as the Jacobin *philosophes* connected to the radical excesses of the Revolution). However, the female patriot of 1821, who addresses a nation understood to be on the brink of destruction, is also the heroine of a revolutionary epic. She revels in her position centre stage, in contrast to her husband who is silent, unwell, and finally dead. Living in France, West appears

²³² Barrell, p. 77.

temporarily liberated from the constrictions of feminine propriety, as she escapes murder in a breath-taking carriage race, defends her right to wear a feather in her hat, and represents an Irish soldier at his trial. But this striking image of the counter-revolutionary heroine of the 1790s threatens the carefully constructed image of the conservative woman writer of the 1820s.

This tension between conservative conformity and sexual equality shapes West's account of her membership of the French freemasons. Through this affiliation she is aligned with 'every man of property and probity' (p. 18), but her familiarity with a masculine sphere represents a dangerous sexual transgression. English freemasonry was intimately connected with royalty and the status quo, evident in Linda Colley's observation that 'by 1800, almost all of the male members of the Royal Family were masons'.²³³ However, it was also an exclusively male fraternity, as in 1723 the British grand lodge issued a constitutional proscription against women members. In contrast, in France mixed gender affiliate or 'adoption' lodges received official recognition in 1774.²³⁴ In the *Residence*, West recalls that she attended a lodge at Rheims 'for about two years and a half' (p. 9). She anxiously reassures her reader that her membership is consistent with the ideals of feminine propriety. Yet, she also prides herself on her unique status:

Be not alarmed, my fair country-women! but smile if you will – such things are not common in this country – nor you, my Brethren of Britain, frown not! though females are not allowed by English Masonry – yet, the *sister kingdom can boast of one female mason as good as any*; and many there are in France who do honour to the Craft: But *even* in that country, they do not make women Masons, without great discrimination, as *every* woman is not adapted by nature (through want of *nerve*, or some other reason) to be a Freemason. Not one of you, my Brethren, honour Masonry more than I do; and remember a *certain Text in Scripture, &c. &c. &c.* (pp. 8-9)

West makes no demand for sexual equality and rehearses the language of separate spheres, claiming that '*every* woman is not adapted by nature' to be a freemason. Yet, she also refuses to identify herself with this orthodoxy and notes that in her own exceptional case '*the sister kingdom can boast of one female mason as good as any*'.

²³³ Colley, p. 227.

²³⁴ Janet M. Burke, 'Leaving the Enlightenment: Women Freemasons after the Revolution', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33 (1999-2000), 255-65 (pp. 255-56).

This paradoxical combination of sexual conservatism and radical feminism echoes recent characterisations of the French freemasons by historians. Dena Goodman presents the lodges as a force that re-inscribed gender stereotypes, arguing that ‘at the heart of Masonic language are the old discourse of gallantry and the new one of conjugal love, wifely submission, and domestic harmony’.²³⁵ Whereas, in contrast, Janet Burke suggests that ‘the powerful rituals, the emotional bonds of sisterhood, the assertiveness of their incipient feminism and the novel feelings of friendship’ had an empowering impact on the personal identities and public actions of women freemasons.²³⁶ The lodges were composed of aristocrats and *haute bourgeoisie* and their principal aim was philanthropic, which may have satisfied West’s social ambitions and her desire for a Christian mission.²³⁷ However, her undisguised pride in her exceptional ‘nerve’ also suggests her attraction towards the role of the Masonic hero, able to address her brothers in 1821 on equal terms and soothe the fears of her ‘fair country-women’.

Despite these moments of radicalism, West ultimately aligns herself with the existing social order and subscribes to restrictive gender ideologies (even if she refuses to apply them to her own conduct). This aversion to feminist resistance or female solidarities is apparent in her dramatic account of a bread riot in Paris, when she is ‘stopped by a body of four hundred women of the lowest class, all talking at once’ (p. 86). West recalls that she accompanied the women to the Louvre, since ‘resistance to their will would have been vain’ (p. 93). However, she rejects her designated role as a fellow ‘Citizen’ and attempts to re-establish a sense of hierarchy within the group, translating the revolutionary crowd into social and military terms as ‘my *light troop*’ and ‘my *Ladies*’ (pp. 93-94). In order to escape, West opportunistically elects herself as their leader by falsely claiming a contact at the ‘Victualling Office’ and offering to present the women’s ‘distresses’ and ‘wants’ ‘in the name of the whole body’ (p. 94). West’s disingenuous stance reverses Elliott’s former guise of neutrality in the crowd, as she assumes a political position for the purposes of expediency. She aligns herself

²³⁵ Goodman, p. 258.

²³⁶ Janet M. Burke, ‘Freemasonry, Friendship and Noblewomen: The Role of the Secret Society in Bringing Enlightenment Thought to Pre-Revolutionary Women Elites’, *History of European Ideas*, 10 (1989), 283-93 (p. 285).

²³⁷ Burke, ‘Freemasonry, Friendship, and Noblewomen’, p. 284; and Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob, ‘French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship’, *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (1996), 513-49 (pp. 540-43).

with the establishment, proudly reporting the guard's comment that "you are not one of *them*" and 'praying for an alleviation' of the women's 'misery' rather than calling for social reform (pp. 94-95). However, while she disassociates herself from this model of female public selfhood, the encounter reveals the complexities of counter-revolutionary authorship. For West is at once a heroine addressing the revolutionary crowd and a mouthpiece for the existing social order.

West's narrative of the female patriot and the counter-revolutionary heroine is framed by Shakespearean quotations. She opens with a speech from *King John*, advocating the power of solidarity and rallying the princes to support the throne (iii).²³⁸ But she closes with lines from *Othello*, testifying to the power of story telling in an address to her readers who have 'followed me through all my misfortunes and hair-breadth escapes' (p. 100).²³⁹ This tension between political communities and heroic individualism is registered in the discontinuity of West's narrative voice and her vacillations between conservative apostrophes to the establishment and breathless accounts of revolutionary heroism. West demonstrates the feminist potential of conservative politics, speaking in a moral register and authorising her political intervention through alignment with the nation, the Church, and the throne. In the process, she places herself in a perpetual state of contradiction. She defends a social order that denies her public voice and relinquishes self-expression to the demands of popular conservatism. Therefore, West's text is reminiscent of the journals of Mary Tooth and Elizabeth Fox, which reveal that communal identifications and commitment to a shared history shapes an individual's capacity for self-articulation. However, West also reinforces Mary Robinson's claim that literary production presents a unique opportunity for female independence and self-affirmation. For while she claims to write the history of the female patriot she also tells the story of the counter-revolutionary writer, who may be subject to a loyalist script but is nonetheless the author of her own narrative.

²³⁸ William Shakespeare, *King John*, ed. by E. A. Honigmann, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot and others (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), V. 7. 115-18.

²³⁹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by E. A. Honigmann, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* (see Proudfoot, above), I. 3. 129-40.

As a group, these texts reveal the challenges and the fulfilments of political affiliation and present a picture of the intellectual and emotional confusion experienced by revolutionary respondents. Attaching the self to a collective political history may act as a source of personal continuity and public empowerment, as it does for Williams, or enable self-recovery and personal transformation, as it does for Wollstonecraft. However, Elliott's emotional attachment to a past political regime produces feelings of social displacement, while West experiences personal discontinuity and loses her voice in the rallying cry. In their life writing, Williams and Wollstonecraft address the tension between universal citizenship and personal identity and reveal what is at stake in attaching private life to public concerns. Their political selfhood is grounded in personal experience and particular attachments and finds expression in a universal community, evident in their self-identifications as the citizen of the world, the revolutionary heroine, and the Romantic woman writer. The form of their life writing expresses this ideal symbiosis, fusing personal narrative with political commentary and balancing self-authorship with female identifications and sympathetic connection. Their approach is therefore reminiscent of Elizabeth Steele's blend of sentiment, satire, and sexual politics or Catharine Phillips's ability to speak simultaneously as a woman in her own voice and as the embodiment of a spiritual tradition. In contrast, Elliott combines her sexual and political identities and provides an alternative to a public discourse of rationalism. However, her aristocratic politics also privileges self-interest and elite networks over ideological commitments and suggests that political solidarities are synonymous with a loss of personal identity. West, on the other hand, imagines herself as a moral and spiritual guardian and demonstrates the potential for conservatism to enable a public intervention. But nonetheless, her political identity is premised on her subjection to the throne and her commitment to the status quo. The contribution of conservative women writers to discussions of revolutionary politics is yet to be fully recognised by eighteenth-century scholars. However, exploring women's political identities that are premised on sexuality, spirituality, and morality presents a more complete picture of political participation in the period, even if these writers fall short of the ideal of cosmopolitan citizenship and a progressive class politics that speaks to our contemporary moment.

Conclusion

This project began with the assumption that communal affiliations and social networks were inherently enabling for women writers. However, it became a study of both the freedoms and constraints that women experience in identifying themselves as spiritual selves, sexual characters, and revolutionary subjects. Religious affiliation provided women with a sense of coherence and social belonging, enabled self-reinvention through spiritual conversion, and provoked independent self-assertions in the clash between kinship and faith. At its best, spiritual autobiography fostered women's critical self-consciousness and capacity for self-articulation, and established a recognised route into print. In contrast to the sexually transgressive identity of the courtesan or the political interventions of the revolutionary historian, female spirituality could be reconciled with secular images of feminine propriety. It therefore allowed public participation on the basis of moral guardianship and spiritual (although not sexual) equality. However, while a language of faith enabled women to fashion powerful public roles it also inhibited articulations of personal desire or secular citizenship. In addition, women risked self-division, as they struggled to reconcile an individuated relationship to God with the demands of a corporate spiritual fellowship and attempted to balance the autobiographical imperative for self-expression with the pressure for religious conformity.

In contrast, women who inhabited the role of courtesan wrote as the self-authored subjects of self-determined narratives and framed their vindications as a response to repressive moral scripts and sexual inequalities. They rejected conventional models of female character and constructed narratives of social, artistic, and financial progress as an alternative to masculine accounts of public achievement and the repressive plot of the 'fallen' sexual victim. Whether they aligned themselves with an aristocratic elite or asserted their oppositional stance within a corrupt society, they nonetheless opened up the possibility for sexuality to play a part in female identity and public discourse. However, they also revealed the strains of a marginal position in their recurrently expressed desires for re-inscription within a sympathetic circle of readers and demonstrated the pressures of dependency on the sexual and literary marketplace. Therefore, unlike her spiritual counterpart, the courtesan was compelled to manage a

disjunction between private and public selfhood. This division presented a creative opportunity for self-reinvention, but it also resulted in a continuous struggle for self-consistency, personal security, and social connection.

Faith potentially fostered a quietist acceptance of the existing social order and a retreat into an otherworldly realm, while sexuality raised women to public prominence but undermined their cultural authority. In contrast, political communities provided a sense of group belonging comparable to a religious fellowship, but also allowed a degree of personal agency associated with the figure of the self-made courtesan. Political writers connected private life to public citizenship and attached personal experience to collective history. However, they also experienced self-fragmentation in the tension between ideological commitments and political practices, and were forced to revise their identities in response to changes in the revolutionary script.

Read in dialogue, these sources reveal the empowering effects of social affiliations and communal histories, but also demonstrate the importance of self-determination and creative autonomy. This balance is articulated by West's twin call to her reader to 'rally round the throne' and follow her through her 'hair-breadth escapes', as we are asked to engage in a collective identification on the basis of shared ideals, yet also develop a personal relationship through an exchange of particular sympathy.²⁴⁰ Women's life writing is marked by the difficulties of reconciling personal identity and social connection, but, as a consequence, it allows us to explore the liberating ideal of combining difference and diversity with attachment and belonging.

²⁴⁰ Charlotte West, *A Ten Years' Residence in France, during the Severest Part of the Revolution; from the Year 1787 to 1797* (London: William Sams, 1821), pp. 19 and 100.

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